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Emerson and the New Testament.

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EMERSON AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by
Lee Wells Miller
M. A., The Rice Institute, 1948
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Abstract
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In making this study I am particularly indebted to Dr. Arlin Turner, whose ready willingness to give generously of his time and advice has earned my sincere gratitude; to Dr. Lewis Simpson, who has given me many helpful suggestions; and to Dr. N. M. Caffee, whose friendly counsel has been appreciated.

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ABSTRACT

Ever since the publication in 1836 of Nature, which has been said to contain the essence of Emerson's entire later philosophy, many attempts have been made to identify the primary source of his thought. Such attempts have been almost embarrassingly fruitful of results, for Emerson's abundant use of quotations and paraphrases from many sources has enabled scholars, according to their interests and specialized knowledge, to designate a number of them as the source of his basic concepts.) Consequently, this primary source has been variously identified as the Neoplatonic writings, the Oriental scriptures, and the idealistic works of Carlyle, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Goethe, and others. No one of these claims, however, has been accepted without qualification, for the consistent fundamental principles of Emerson's philosophy are apparent in the journals and early sermons written before he had had more than a superficial acquaintance with any of these writings.

In view of this fact, it seemed necessary to assume the existence of another, earlier source in

which Emerson found the tenets which form the foundation of his later philosophy. The writer, therefore, extended his investigation to the earliest records of the development of Emerson's beliefs - the journals, letters, and early sermons - in order to identify a possible earlier source. The study confirmed that the incipient elements of Emerson's philosophy are evident before 1830, the year of his first real acquaintance with Neoplatonism and Orientalism, and well before his interest in any of the later "sources." In particular, it was found not only that these beliefs are closely associated with his theological conclusions resulting from his study of the New Testament but that they are stated in unmistakably Christian terms in the journals and are repeated, after further development, in the early sermons in which he advances these "transcendental" concepts, supported by New Testament texts, either as particular doctrines of Jesus or as immediate effects of his teachings.

(The three-fold comparison of the journals and early sermons with the published essays and the New Testament, interpreted from Emerson's Unitarian point of view, reveals that the basic concepts of Emerson's philosophy are in no way inconsistent with the fundamental teachings of Jesus; that the journal entries containing these genetic ideas were the direct effects

of Emerson's intensive study of the New Testament; that the same conclusions recorded in the journals were developed at greater length in his early sermons; and that the elementary beliefs presented in the sermons formed the basis of the more fully developed transcendental philosophy incorporated in Nature of 1836.) (In view of this evidence, it is concluded that the major elements of Emerson's thought were fixed long before he came in contact with the other "sources;" that these "sources" were confirming but secondary influences from which he often borrowed apt and fitting phrases to express and support his final views in the essays; and that the true original source of the fundamental principles of Emerson's philosophy was the New Testament of the King James Bible.)

PREFACE

(The attempt to ascertain the origins of the ideas which make up Emerson's philosophy began soon after the publication of Nature in 1836 and has continued to interest students of Emerson ever since.) Although the sources of his philosophical concepts are understandably difficult to define, in general scholars have inclined toward one of two schools of opinion. Those in one school agree largely that the chief elements of his idealistic thought were derived ultimately from the Neoplatonic interpretations of the philosophy of Plato, supplemented and modified by the mystical philosophy of the Oriental scriptures and the Kantian idealism as interpreted and reported in the writings of Carlyle, Coleridge, Goethe, and others. (The differences of opinion within this group concern primarily the question of priority and the proportionate amount of influence each of these particular sources exerted in the formulation of Emerson's philosophy.)

(Thus John S. Harrison argues in The Teachers of Emerson¹ that, although German idealism and Eastern

¹New York: Sturgis & Walton Co., 1910.

mysticism may have influenced Emerson somewhat, by far the most important force in his intellectual development was Greek thought, and consequently he believes that Emerson's philosophy is essentially Platonic. Frederic I. Carpenter, in Emerson and Asia,² states, however, that it was not so much Platonism that appealed to Emerson as Neoplatonism, a combination of Eastern and Western thought the study of which served primarily as a preparation for and an introduction to the Oriental literature which he was to study later and adapt to his own philosophy. Carpenter adds that even though the major influence on Emerson's thought from about 1845 on, as evidenced by his later works, was exerted by the Oriental scriptures and related literature, the chief elements of his thought had been suggested earlier by the Neoplatonic writers. He agrees with Harrison that the development of the Kantian school of German idealism paralleled the growth of American Transcendentalism but exerted little or no direct influence upon it. Arthur E. Christy, in The Orient in American Transcendentalism,³ differs with both Harrison and Carpenter in that he believes the Oriental writings were the predominant influence on the formation of

²Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930.

³New York: Columbia University Press, 1932.

Emerson's philosophy and the development of the Transcendental movement.) Whereas Carpenter believes that the fundamental principles of Emerson's philosophy, such as the Over-Soul, Intuition, and Unity and Variety, are essentially Neoplatonic in conception, Christy contends not only that the idea and name of the Over-Soul are Oriental in origin but also that its related concepts of Reality and Illusion, the balance of Good and Evil, and the law of Compensation derived from the Orient. Other scholars have adequately demonstrated the important but relatively minor influence on Emerson's intellectual development exerted by Montaigne, Carlyle, Goethe, Wordsworth, and Coleridge.

This group contains the majority of Emerson scholars, and they have presented excellent critical and analytical studies showing the weight of the various sources on the development and expression of Emerson's philosophical concepts; yet they have left unanswered the important question as to the primary source of his basic principles. Up to a certain point, each is able to support his thesis by showing that a number of ideas in his particular "source" parallel those in the Essays and that Emerson used a wealth of paraphrases and quotations from the source, but each is eventually faced with the

unalterable fact that the germs of the same ideas appear in Emerson's journals, letters, and early sermons, which were written before Emerson had more than a superficial acquaintance with any one of these particular sources. It would seem to be for this reason that the majority of such studies of Emerson have been more concerned with ascertaining the amount of influence exerted by individual authors or movements on his intellectual development than with definite determination of the origin of his fundamental principles.

(The question of origins has been recognized by many Emerson scholars as important to an understanding of his thought, and the note of perplexity expressed by F. I. Carpenter in Emerson and Asia is perhaps representative of the feelings of others who, after finding what would seem to be conclusive proof of a definite source, are confronted with the fact that the main tenets of Emerson's philosophy were apparently fixed in his mind long before he had come into serious contact with the source under consideration.) In his examination of the influence of Oriental philosophy upon the development of Emerson's thought, Carpenter says, "...in his later life he was to explore this mysterious literature for himself, and to appropriate much of its rich wisdom; but he was not an Orientalist from the outset, and throughout his early life, Oriental

literature was known to him only indirectly. His philosophy was formed in ignorance of it, and not until his mature years did it strongly affect his thought."⁴ Again, in treating the Neoplatonic influence on Emerson, he adds:

Many of Emerson's chief philosophic ideas correspond strikingly to those of Neoplatonism, and some may be traced directly to that philosophy. Since Nature has been said to contain most of Emerson's philosophy in miniature, and since it was his first published work, an investigation of the Neoplatonic ideas in it may be of especial interest. But since most of Emerson's reading in the Neoplatonists was of a later date, their effect on his more mature philosophic ideas can be clearly seen only in his later essays. Indeed, at the time of writing Nature, Emerson had not yet come on Taylor's translations of the Neoplatonists. All phrases in it suggestive of Neoplatonism seem to be derived indirectly from secondary sources. And yet many Neoplatonic borrowings occur.⁵

The second school of opinion, without the aid of such factual evidence as identifiable paraphrases and direct quotations to support their theories, have endeavored to go beyond the findings of the first group in an attempt to identify either the original source of or the primary influence upon Emerson's early thought. With slight shades of personal difference, they agree in general that Emerson and his philosophy are natural

⁴P. 2.

⁵P. 67.

products of his time, place, and immediate heritage. They feel that ultimately the source of Emerson's philosophy is New England Calvinism. Although many of the fundamental ideas which make up the body of his thought seem to be directly descended from Calvinism, they say, some are apparently the result of a reaction against the older religion, having passed through the alembic of Unitarianism and Emerson's own discriminating mind. Thus, his New England Calvinistic heritage, his Unitarian environment, and his early religious training under the influence of such a notable Unitarian thinker as William Ellery Channing, all played a part in the formation of Emerson's philosophy. Since Unitarianism was a reaction against Calvinism, and since Emerson in turn revolted against Unitarianism, assuming that two negatives make a positive, the theory implies that Emersonian transcendentalism is a romantic and idealistic re-interpretation of the Calvinistic doctrines and concepts with which he was familiar. Although obviously over-simplified, this statement is not really as specious as it may at first glance appear.

(Perry Miller, for example, in the article "Jonathan Edwards to Emerson,"⁶ in which he analyzes the continuity of New England thought, shows both Unitarianism

⁶The New England Quarterly, XIII (December, 1940), 589-617.

and Transcendentalism to be lineal descendants of earlier Calvinism, each representative of one side of its dual nature. The tenet of Intuitive Knowledge, for instance, may go back to the Calvinistic doctrine of regeneration, the theory that the spiritually reborn soul is joined to God by a direct infusion of the divine spirit. From this doctrine it is easy to deduce the possibility of receiving all instruction through mystical communion with the spirit within - exactly the belief of the Quakers, who began as Calvinists. Since the regenerate soul is thus joined to God, it is likewise a logical conclusion that God imparts his instructions directly to the individual, without the aid of an intermediary. From other Calvinist doctrines of divine creation and providence may be deduced the idea that God is immanent in nature, a resident sovereign who rules according to a law of justice, granting rewards and retributions to all his subjects. It is not difficult to perceive, therefore, that the Emersonian doctrines of the Over-Soul and the Intuitive Perception of the Individual, if not exactly the same, are at least extraordinarily similar to certain Calvinistic concepts.

Needless to say, the clergy, who were responsible for the maintenance of a disciplined church, frowned upon the more liberal interpretations of Calvinist

doctrines and whenever possible drove out and persecuted those who favored such beliefs. Thus the conservative side of Puritanism held as its ideal social conformity, law and order, and regulation and control. To the liberals' contention that the doctrine of God's immanence implied that man also is divine, since he too is part of the universe, the conservatives answered with the orthodox theological argument that man is inherently evil as a result of Original Sin. Thus, when the liberal element argued that man's divinity entitles him to practice complete self-reliance, which would be reliance upon the spirit within, the conservative party's reply was that such self-reliance would be a deceptive reliance upon man's own evil nature. Therefore, all that seems to prevent a general acceptance of the liberal interpretation of the Calvinist doctrines is merely the orthodox theological argument of the inherent evil nature of man and its corollary, the complete separation of God and nature.

In time, the Unitarian revolt against Calvinism removed the greater part of the theological dogmas from Calvinism. Thus, in effect, although it represented the conservative element of the New England tradition, Unitarianism opened the way for the development of the liberal element of Puritanism. With their new-found freedom, the liberal Calvinists

rapidly set about organizing themselves into various sects and churches representing their respective views. Many reorganized as Congregationalists, others followed new prophets, such as Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, to form the new Church of Latter Day Saints, and some, following their particular inclinations, became Quakers or Shakers. A few, turning away from the cold formality of Unitarianism, developed a heterogeneous religio-philosophy which has generally been identified as Transcendentalism. With this group Ralph Waldo Emerson was for a time associated.

(In his book American Idealism,⁷ Floyd Stovall likewise claims Transcendentalism to be for the most part a product of the evolution of Puritanism.) Agreeing with the findings of Perry Miller in general, he differs with him by defining Transcendentalism as an evolutionary outgrowth of Unitarianism, rather than as a separate lineal descendant of Calvinism. Although his account of the evolutionary process is somewhat condensed, it ably confirms Miller's thesis that Emersonian idealism has as its logical source the wellspring of New England Puritanism.

Since the evidence of Emerson's letters, journals, and early sermons, indicates that the fundamental

⁷Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943.

elements of his thought were fixed long before he made the acquaintance of either Neoplatonism or Orientalism, it would seem that the more logical theory of the original source of his philosophical concepts and the primary influence on their development is that advanced by the second school of opinion, in spite of the evidence presented by the first group to show the Neoplatonists and the Oriental writers as possible sources. To paraphrase Emerson's comment that of the two political parties in the land, one had the best men, whereas the other had the best cause, it might perhaps be said that of the two theories concerning the primary source of his concepts, the first has the more factual evidence, but the second has the more logical hypothesis.

The two schools of opinion are reconcilable, it may be said, in that the one singles out various philosophical influences on the shaping of Emerson's mature thought and the other attempts to go back of those influences and discover earlier and hence more significant directing forces in the religious and philosophical climate closer to Emerson in his early years, the years in which the evidence makes it clear the bent of his mind became fixed. The present study begins with the assumption supported by the second school, that Emerson's general philosophical outlook

was determined by the currents of thought which touched him as he grew up, studied for the ministry, and preached in the Second Church of Boston. Important in this thought were the bequests of New England Puritanism and the evolution of Unitarianism as reflected by William Ellery Channing and his contemporaries. But central in the thinking of the early Puritan divines and Channing alike was, of course, the Bible, particularly the New Testament; and it is not difficult to assume that, aware of the individual's responsibility to arrive at religious truth and with the independence of mind we know Emerson had, he turned to the New Testament with more seriousness than to the volumes of conflicting and bewildering commentary.

That the Bible was an early and valuable source for Emerson's thought and phrasing has been acknowledged by several scholars, but none have attempted to determine the real extent of its use or its influence on his thought and writing. Certainly Harriet R. Zink's admirable study, "Emerson's Use of the Bible,"⁸ is a step in this direction, but she is concerned more with specific instances of quotation, paraphrasing, and parallel phrasing than with any influence the Bible may have exerted on the formation or development of his

⁸ University of Nebraska Studies in Language, Literature, and Criticism, No. 14 (Lincoln, Nebraska: 1935), 1-75.

thought.) Perhaps Arthur Cushman McGiffert, in his introduction and notes to Young Emerson Speaks,⁹ goes further than anyone else in his assumption that Emerson found all his principles rooted in the Bible and that as a minister he dealt in his early sermons with themes which were to characterize his thinking throughout his life.) Pointing out possible parallels between the sermons and the essays, he states that Emerson often returned to both the journals and the sermons for material to use in the lectures and essays. Unfortunately, he provides no documentation and offers no evidence for his assertions. Although such studies as these confirmed my earlier conviction that there was a closer relationship between Emerson's philosophy and the mystical teachings of Jesus than had hitherto been demonstrated, they failed to present any satisfactory evidence for or against an ideological affinity. The unanswered question and the lack of any adequate investigation of that particular aspect of the formation and development of Emerson's early thought provided the immediate suggestion for the present study.

It is the purpose of this study, therefore, to explore Emerson's thought in relation to his religious heritage and environment, and to give special attention

⁹Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1938.

to the New Testament. Since Emerson apparently held basically the same fundamental ideas before he came in contact with the Neoplatonists, and the main body of his thought was determined well before the publication of Nature in 1836, a careful investigation has convinced the writer that the New Testament of the King James Bible was Emerson's earliest source, for in it he would have first met many elements of Oriental thought as well as its Neoplatonic-Christian philosophy. The importance of the Bible in Emerson's early life and the fact that his basic philosophical tenets are entirely consistent with the fundamental principles of Jesus would seem to support the belief that the New Testament was the earliest and most important influence on the formation of his thought. That other sources exerted an important secondary influence on the later development and expression of his philosophy is not to be denied, but their influence seems to have been important only as they confirmed or added to the already fixed primary principles.

Since the aim of this work is to show that the New Testament is the most probable original source of Emerson's basic thought, a three-fold plan of approach has been adopted which, it is believed, will reveal, first, the importance of the New Testament not simply as a source but as the primary influence upon the

formation of his thought as recorded in the early journals; next, the amount of Emerson's expansion of these fixed principles in his early sermons; and, finally, the extent of his repetition and formal presentation of the same concepts in the published essays as a philosophy and a way of life. It will be seen that the fundamental ideas remain essentially the same throughout the records of his intellectual development and that the principal difference between the sermons and the essays, besides a more mature style in the latter, is that whereas in the sermons his basic concepts are supported by textual quotations from the New Testament, in the essays, although often presented in the same words, they are illustrated by select quotations and paraphrases from such secondary sources of influence as Plato, the Neoplatonists, Eastern literature, or the English Romanticists. The reason for Emerson's substitution of quotations from secular works for the former supporting texts from the New Testament is dwelt on at greater length later; briefly, however, it was that the conventional and often-heard ministerial phrases had for his orthodox congregations and audiences such a limited and restricted connotation that they failed to convey the larger thought he intended.

Specifically, the plan involves the tracing of each

of the major elements of Emerson's thought from the first evidence of its conception in the journals, through the sermons, and into the published essays. Each of these concepts is then traced directly to the New Testament and compared to strikingly similar or identical ideas contained therein, and evidence is presented from Emerson's letters or journals to show that he had indeed encountered the idea in the New Testament before he was well acquainted with either the Neoplatonic writers or Oriental literature.

The actual organization of this study, however, does not follow the chronological pattern indicated by the plan of approach described above, for even as the philosophical concepts of Emerson are correlative and cyclical, so the organization of the present study should parallel as nearly as possible the organic nature of his thought. An attempt to treat Emerson's philosophy as a collection of separate and distinct ethical and moral observations would be not only misleading to the reader but also disastrous to the conclusions of this study. Therefore, in individual but mutually dependent chapters, each major element of Emerson's philosophy, as well as some of the more closely related minor concepts, will be presented, first, as it stands in its final form in the essays; then, as it parallels an identical or like idea in

the New Testament; and, finally, as it appears in the journals and early sermons in its incipient stages of transition from its New Testament sources. This arrangement has the advantage for the reader, who is probably more familiar with the New Testament and the published essays of Emerson than with his lesser known letters, sermons, and journals, that he will perceive at the outset the identity or the closeness of Emerson's ideas to those in the New Testament before viewing them in the transitional stages which reveal the process by which Emerson interpreted and gradually adapted the initial ideas into a philosophical system.

The first chapter surveys briefly the results of the more recent investigations by Emerson scholars and points out their general agreement on a number of secondary influences which may well have affected the later development of Emerson's concepts. Following the chapters on the main elements in Emerson's thought, a chapter is included to indicate the singularly close relationship of the teaching methods employed by Jesus and Emerson, and a brief chapter summarizing the results of this investigation concludes the study.

The Centenary Edition of 1903 has been used throughout for references to Emerson's collected works. Similarly, all references to his letters are to the excellent collection edited by Ralph L. Rusk. Arthur

Cushman McGiffert's Young Emerson Speaks is the best edition to date of selected early sermons by Emerson and has been used for all material quoted from the sermons. It is regretted that this study has had to be made without the advantage of the forthcoming edition by Robert E. Spiller and George Whicher of all Emerson's manuscript sermons, for it is believed that they will present further corroborative evidence that Emerson held the principal concepts of his philosophy long before they found expression in Nature and the Essays and even before he had begun his intensive study of the generally acknowledged "sources." References to other editions of works by Emerson are shown in footnotes, and all books used in the course of this study are listed in the bibliography.

I

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMERSON'S THOUGHT

Biographical facts make it clear that in his early years Ralph Waldo Emerson's life and thought took the course dictated by his heritage and his environment. Descended from a long line of Puritan settlers and New England pioneers, many of whom were ministers, he was born in Boston, May 25, 1803, the son of a liberal Unitarian minister. After the death of his father, William Emerson, in 1811, the family attended the church of William Ellery Channing, the outstanding Unitarian preacher and critic, and with the help of Channing, Emerson was admitted in 1825 to the newly established Harvard Divinity School. Encouraged by their mother, Channing, and Aunt Mary Moody Emerson, Waldo and his older brother William had determined early to become ministers, following the tradition of their family. From 1825 to 1828, with frequent interruptions occasioned by ill health, Emerson pursued his studies at Harvard in preparation for the ministry. By 1829, when he was able to accept the call to become pastor of the Second Church in Boston, he had already begun to outgrow the narrow

restrictions of orthodox Unitarianism, and his sermons reveal that although he at first avoided attacking any of the more cherished beliefs of his congregation he had early insisted on his right to speak the truth as he saw it. For the next three years the parochial duties of a resident minister became increasingly irksome, and the punctilious performance of empty ceremonies, the petty politics involved in handling church committees, and his seeming inability even to dent the armor of his listeners' orthodox preconceptions with a new thought as long as it had to be presented in conventional Christian terms made him increasingly aware of the necessity for his complete separation from the church and the regaining of his independence. In 1832, with the good wishes of his congregation, he resigned from the pulpit and began what was in effect a lifelong ministry as a layman lecturer, preaching essentially the same views but without the hindrance of the orthodox connotations generally inherent in any sermon preached from the pulpit. Four years later he published, in a small volume entitled Nature, the results of years of thoughtful meditation. Although the book attracted little attention, its publication marked an important phase in his life, for in it he demonstrated that he had reached the end

of the first step in his philosophical studies, the determination of fundamental principles. Every major concept of the Emersonian philosophy is contained in this thin volume, and the later essays are but expanded and reinforced treatments of these individual elements of his thought.

The basic tenets of Emerson's philosophy, the primary beliefs which are consistently evident in the works he published as well as the journals, letters, and sermons he left in manuscript, are familiar to even the casual student of Emerson. The chief element of his thought and the fountainhead of his whole philosophy is his conception of God as the immanent and sustaining soul of the universe. The universe, he says in his introduction to Nature, is composed of nature and soul. Elsewhere he states that the visible world of nature is the apparition of God. Thus the apparent duality of the world is an illusion, for in reality all is one. The Universal Soul, or Over-Soul, is the life-giving force of the invisible spirit of God, and the material world of nature is the visible apparition of God. All in the universe is therefore of and from God, but God is not to be thought restricted by this universe. God is the unlimited, eternal source of all life and power.

Since man, too, is a part of the universe, he also

✓ must be composed of nature and animated by soul.
 Thus man, ✓ an integral part ✓ of the divine creation,
 but a separate entity, not only is divine in both
 body and soul but is also important as an individual ✓.
 ✓ He is not the haphazard result of chance and heredity,
 appearing for a brief period of conscious existence,
 only to be obliterated by death and disintegration; ✓
 he is a necessary part of the whole and purposely
 incarnated in order to fulfill a part of the divine
 plan. For the physical defense, maintenance, and
 preservation of his body, he is endowed with a
 practical common sense or Understanding ✓. For his
 moral guidance, perception of the divine plan, and
 spiritual communion with God, he is born with Reason
 or divine intuition. His Understanding enables him
 to comprehend the material laws of cause and effect,
 and, through experience, to avoid dangers, to
 anticipate the future, and to master his environment.
 His Reason, or intuition, on the other hand, is
 metaphysical and enables him to pierce the material
 surfaces of the visible world to perceive the under-
 lying and sustaining spirit of God and his attributes
 of truth, beauty, justice, and love. In a more
 personal sense, Reason reveals moral truth and serves
 as law-giver and guide.

Having innate within himself the ability to perceive

intuitively truth and God, man has no need to receive knowledge or instruction at second hand. Indeed, he should not, for only the knowledge and instruction received by the individual through communion with God is true for him and for him alone. He can know to be true only what he himself perceives to be true or what he can confirm, through his own experience, of the findings of others. Therefore it is necessary for the individual to be completely self-reliant, that is, to be reliant upon the "God within," the innate intuitive perception.

As mentioned previously, duality in the universe is an illusion of the Understanding. Trained and intended to witness the working of cause and effect in the physical world, Understanding sees only variety in a universe composed of individual parts. Reason, however, perceives the essential unity of all in God, since all is of and from God. Duality, polarity, undulation, and the common distinctions made between good and evil are apparent to the Understanding in this world, but Reason perceives that all are but different aspects of the One Truth, that Unity prevails over apparent variety, and that good is the intended end of all things. It is man's limited perspective which prevents him from perceiving the final good resulting from events which appear to his Understanding

to be evil. Such distinctions as good, evil, better, and best, that man is prone to make, are in reality but illusionary and arbitrary classifications of events which his restricted Understanding fails to comprehend. All things proceed according to the divine plan for the good of the whole; hence the individual parts of the whole share in this common good.

Thus the well-known law of Compensation, which partakes of duality, is likewise an illusionary law of the Understanding. Apparent in the physical world as a law of nature, as polarity, undulation, action and reaction, when considered in the light of Reason as a spiritual law, it is seen to lose its dual character of plus and minus, give and take, and its essential unity is clearly visible. Although it is one and the same law, it appears differently to the Understanding and to Reason. The Understanding says that a virtuous act is compensated by an appropriate reward; Reason says virtue rewards itself, meaning that the act and the reward are one, even as two sides of a coin are one coin. Thus, says Emerson, in the material world of the Understanding every good must be bought and paid for, every evil is compensated for by some good; but in the spiritual world of Reason, virtue is not bought by a loss of

any kind, but rather it rewards not only by giving peace, joy, and contentment, but also by giving even more virtue so that every virtuous act makes possible an even greater virtuous act, which in turn brings an even greater reward. Hence, in the material world of Understanding the law of Compensation works tit for tat, give and take, in even balance; but in the spiritual world of Reason the cards are stacked in our favor, and an active interest in our personal good is shown by a benevolent Deity.

Emerson's first extensive acquaintance with the Neoplatonic and Oriental writers had begun approximately two years before the publication of Nature, a fact which has produced the general assumption that the ideas contained in Nature are ipso facto Neoplatonic or Oriental. The following pages of this chapter will survey the evidence for these and others as sources of Emerson's thought. Chronology will be noted in an effort to fix the points at which these influences first appeared in relation to the initial formation of his own ideas in order to assess their proper weight in shaping the course of his thought.

Before surveying the acknowledged secondary sources of influence on the development of Emerson's philosophy, however, something must first be said about his peculiar method of reading and assimilation

of ideas. Brought up in a Unitarian family, and having a Unitarian religious training, he read and studied the Bible from the Unitarian point of view: that the Bible contains divine truths but that these truths are expressed and presented by fallible men and, therefore, must be interpreted by the individual. This subjection of the Bible and all other sources to personal interpretation became not only a lifelong study habit but also a basic ingredient in his concept of self-reliance and the importance of the individual. The manner in which he read the Bible was no different from that in which he later read all books. All Emerson's reading, beginning with the Bible, apparently served primarily to confirm and verify his own ideas. It brought him evidence of the universality of his own intuitive perception of truth.

Many references to this method of reading for confirmation are scattered through Emerson's journals, letters, and published works, of which only a few need be cited to illustrate his use and justification of the method. For example, in the essay on "Character," he admits that, "Some men's words I remember so well that I must often use them to express my thought. Yes, because I perceive that we have heard the same

truth, but they have heard it better."¹ Again, in a passage in the journals, he comments: "If I stole this thought from Montaigne, as is very likely, I don't care. I should have said the same myself."² But perhaps his best illustration and justification of the method is found in "Spiritual Laws:" "A man is a method, a progressive arrangement; a selecting principle, gathering his like to him wherever he goes. He takes only his own out of the multiplicity that sweeps and circles round him.... What attracts my attention shall have it.... It is enough that these particulars speak to me."³ It is interesting to note, furthermore, that in 1838, when he wrote to the Reverend Henry Ware, Jr., to answer questions concerning the recent "Divinity School Address" and to acknowledge receipt of Ware's sermon in reply, he found it necessary to reassert his independence of action in practically the same terms:

I shall read what you and other good men write, as I have always done, - glad when you speak my thought, and skipping the page

¹The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Edward W. Emerson, Centenary Edition (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903-04), X, 99-100.

²Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Edward W. Emerson and Waldo E. Forbes (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909-14), II, 441.

³Works, II, 144.

that has nothing for me. I shall go on, just as before, seeing whatever I can, and telling what I see; and, I suppose, with the same fortune that has hitherto attended me, - the joy of finding that my abler and better brothers, who work with the sympathy of society, loving and beloved, do now and then unexpectedly confirm my perceptions, and find my nonsense is only their own thought in motley.⁴

Emerson has often been criticized for his lack of scholarship, his unquestioning acceptance of Thomas Taylor's misinterpretations of Plato, his partial borrowing from various sources of only ideas which agreed with or confirmed his own, and his complete disregard of ideas in the same sources which were contradictory of his own. Yet, these objections are in actuality irrelevant, for objective, scholarly criticism of his sources was not Emerson's intention. Often, if not always, he read not so much for the thought of the author as for the thought inspired by the author. Thus, using his own intuitive recognition of truth as a test, he accepted a few of the ideas offered by the author to serve as a foundation for perhaps an entirely new and different train of thought of his own creation. Therefore, in all his reading, as much depended upon what he himself

⁴Frederic I. Carpenter, Ralph Waldo Emerson: Representative Selections (New York: American Book Co., 1934), pp. 8-9. See also Ralph L. Rusk, The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), II, 166-67.

read into the text as what had actually been said or intended by the author. This personal method of reading has been best described by Charles Lowell Young in Emerson's Montaigne:

...it is certainly true that his genius was more creative than critical. The methods of criticism were not his affair. He did not read closely. He did not concern himself overmuch with chronology. He was not given to the analysis of texts, the comparison of one with another, or other procedures of that sort. If he discovered in his reading a strain of thought too discordant with his own, he did not pause upon it. Oftener than not he let it drop out of his mind, and the author with it sometimes, and passed on to the more congenial.⁵

In the essay "Quotation and Originality," Emerson justifies his method as the method of all genius. Admittedly he borrowed from many men and books, but even as "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds,"⁶ so too "Our very abstaining to repeat and credit the fine remark of our friend is thievish."⁷ In fact, the borrowing is honest enough and is creditable both to the borrower and the lender, for, "A great man quotes bravely, and will not draw on his invention when his memory serves

⁵New York: Macmillan Co., 1941, p. 187.

⁶"Self-Reliance," Works, II, 57.

⁷Works, VIII, 189.

him with a word as good,"⁸ and "The capitalist of either kind is as hungry to lend as the consumer to borrow; and the transaction no more indicates intellectual turpitude in the borrower than the simple fact of debt involves bankruptcy."⁹ Indeed, "Next to the originator of a good sentence is the first quoter of it,"¹⁰ and "We are as much informed of a writer's genius by what he selects as by what he originates."¹¹ A study of great literature teaches us that "Original power is usually accompanied with assimilating power,"¹² and that "Genius borrows nobly,"¹³ for, "If we confine ourselves to literature, 'tis easy to see that the debt is immense to past thought. None escapes it. The originals are not original. There is imitation, model and suggestion, to the very archangels, if we knew their history. The first book tyrannizes over the second."¹⁴ And

⁸Ibid., p. 183.

⁹Ibid., p. 189.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 191.

¹¹Ibid., p. 194.

¹²Ibid., p. 190.

¹³Ibid., p. 191.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 180.

"He that comes second must needs quote him that comes first."¹⁵

So much for the general statement of a truth. Specifically, however, Emerson says, "The profit of books is according to the sensibility of the reader. The profoundest thought or passion sleeps as in a mine until an equal mind and heart finds and publishes it."¹⁶ For, "Truth is always present: it only needs to lift the iron lids of the mind's eye to read its oracles."¹⁷ He goes on to say that "...truth is the property of no individual, but is the treasure of all men,"¹⁸ for, "The nobler the truth or sentiment, the less imports the question of authorship."¹⁹ In effect he says that a truth is a truth regardless of who first puts it into words, and as such it is no more the property of the original writer than it is the property of the borrower of his phrases; truth is common property. Indeed, "We expect a great man to be a good reader; or in proportion to the spontaneous power should be

¹⁵Ibid... p. 203.

¹⁶Ibid... p. 194.

¹⁷Ibid... p. 193.

¹⁸Ibid... p. 192.

¹⁹Ibid.

the assimilating power."²⁰ "In literature," he says, "quotation is good only when the writer whom I follow goes my way, and, being better mounted than I, gives me a cast, as we say...."²¹ Often too we give credit to another for our own thought, and "In hours of high mental activity we sometimes do the book too much honor, reading out of it better things than the author wrote, - reading, as we say, between the lines."²²

Thus the manly scholar, whenever he perceives in his reading a truth which he oft has thought but ne'er so well expressed, should not hesitate to borrow the phrasing for his own use and advantage. Yet, this should be no stealthy or shame-faced act but rather a proud claiming of one's own, for all thinking men share an interest in and ownership of truth. Again, although it is common courtesy to give honorable credit to the originator of the phrase, the scholar should not become a slave to the pedantic process of footnoting everything not completely his own. In reality, the quotation or idea is no longer the originator's, for the scholar by employing it in a new context has synthesized the original idea with his own, so that

²⁰Ibid., p. 178.

²¹Ibid., p. 189.

²²Ibid., pp. 196-97.

the resulting idea is but a more advanced expression of a truth, properly belonging to neither, which both were seeking to express. There is likewise an art or skill required in borrowing and adaptation that lends credit to both the borrower and the source. Since this, then, is the method used, acknowledged, and justified by Emerson, all present-day students of his works who seek to identify the specific sources of influence upon his philosophy must carry on their labors intensely conscious of Emerson's own words on the subject: "Whoever expresses to us a just thought makes ridiculous the pains of the critic who should tell him where such a word has been said before."²³

That Emerson borrowed and adapted much from the Bible is well shown in Harriet R. Zink's excellent study, "Emerson's Use of the Bible,"²⁴ in which she sets forth Emerson's manner of using the Bible as a direct source for many metaphorical figures and allusions employed in his poems and essays. Making no attempt to trace the influence of the Bible on the development of Emerson's thought, she concentrates on citing specific instances of parallel phrasing, liberal

²³ Ibid., p. 192.

²⁴ University of Nebraska Studies in Language, Literature, and Criticism, No. 14 (Lincoln, Nebraska: 1935), 1-75.

paraphrasing, and frequent unacknowledged quotation. One of the most interesting sections of her book treats of the manner in which Emerson gains greater force for the presentation of an idea by paraphrasing a pertinent Biblical passage, making a new application of it, and thus benefiting from the association and connotation that it already had for his audience. In this way, as a result of the synthesis of his own thought with that of the original passage, Emerson achieves a third-dimensional effect which forces his listeners or readers to look at an old idea in a new light.

Emerson's early practice of reading for the confirmation of his own ideas may indicate the first practical application of a basic principle in his personal philosophy, for it implies a reliance upon the God within, a self-reliance, and a belief in a universal Divine Intellect which co-inspires all great writers and their perceptive readers. As he relates later in "The Over-Soul," "In the book I read, the good thought returns to me, as every truth will, the image of the whole soul. To the bad thought which I find in it, the same soul becomes a discerning, separating sword, and lops it away."²⁵

²⁵ Works, II, 280.

It is apparent from his journal entries that at an early date he felt that the reader can rely only upon his own intuitive perception or recognition of truth as a guide. The writer himself may not be conscious of his own inspiration, for the Divine Intellect inspires all men to utter truths of which they may well be unaware, and in the midst of nonsense and error may lie a sublime truth awaiting the perceptive reader. It is with this assured self-trust and personal test for truth that Emerson read all books with which he came in contact and which seemed to offer confirmation or verification of basic philosophical principles which his Reason had already affirmed.

Following his long, youthful years of studying the Bible, Emerson's first acquaintance with Plato and the English Platonists came at Harvard College during the years 1817 to 1820. References to Plato and the Platonists in these years and those immediately following graduation, however, are often vague and far from indicative of any extensive study or thorough comprehension of the Platonic philosophy. Rather, they are the glib references and citations of the typical college student whose studies are still fresh in his mind. Moreover, these references most often occur in letters to Aunt Mary Moody Emerson, who was

well read in Plato and Plotinus. Emerson spent as much time and care in writing and correcting these letters to Aunt Mary as he would have spent on any college exercise, and it seems likely that his references to Plato do not suggest a personal interest in Platonic philosophy so much as his diplomacy. At this time Emerson was more concerned with the practical problem of saving enough money from his teaching to enable him to quit the unsatisfactory work and to begin his divinity studies. A comment made in one of his letters to Aunt Mary is especially interesting to the student of Emerson not only for the casualness of his reference to Plato but also for its specific expression of an intention not to remain orthodox but to devise a better system of religious belief for himself. In a letter dated January, 1823, having commented that the writings of Plato and Cicero had probably made the pre-Christian pagans familiar enough with the laws of morality and the doctrine of the immortality of the soul so that they were a matter of common belief, he states that he sees no urgent necessity for the last revelation. The best that can be said of orthodoxy, he writes, is that it has introduced some novelties which were worth unfolding to the ignorance of men. Having stated his case against orthodoxy, he confidently adds: "When I have been to

Cambridge & studied Divinity, I will tell you whether I can make out for myself any better system than Luther or Calvin, or the liberal besoms of modern days."²⁶

In 1830 Emerson first made the acquaintance of the Histoire Comparée des Systèmes de Philosophie par M. De Gérando, a book which was to inspire in him a lifelong interest in both the Greek and the Oriental philosophies. At first, however, his interest was primarily attracted to the Greeks, and he began a serious study of their works. Emerson was not quick to assimilate into his own thought ideas which were not immediately verified by his perceptive intuition. Only after much study and modification did he jot down the significant aspects of an idea repeatedly encountered in his reading and gradually work it into his own philosophical system. This process of modification and gradual assimilation may be traced repeatedly through the journals and on into the essays. Consequently, then, it may be supposed that Emerson's beginning study of the Greeks, even though it preceded the publication of Nature by four or five years, did not influence to any great extent the basic

²⁶Rusk (ed.), Letters, I, 128.

philosophical concepts advanced in that little volume. There is evidence of his Neoplatonic reading in the illustrations of his philosophic principles, to be sure, but not in the tenets themselves, in spite of suggestive resemblances. In the later essays in which he expands and develops the germinal ideas contained in Nature, the influence of Neoplatonic writers is more evident, and quotations and paraphrases from their works are often incorporated in these essays to support his arguments and to serve as illustrations of the universality of truth.

(The greatest influence of the Neoplatonists on Emerson began, however, in 1842 or 1843 when he first met with Thomas Taylor's translations of Plato and the Neoplatonists. In 1842, Henry Wright and Charles Lane, two English mystics known by Emerson, brought to America their libraries which contained various Oriental works and the Taylor translations. In 1843 the Harvard Library also acquired Taylor's translations. Although it is not known which of the sets Emerson first used, it is certain that his acquaintance with Taylor's works dates from this period. Taylor's identification of Platonism with Neoplatonism and his manner of interpreting Plato in the light of Neoplatonic ideas were both adopted by Emerson and became an important influence on the development of his philosophy. Thus

in Taylor's translations, as Emerson read and understood them, Plotinus, Proclus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus were interpreters and exponents of Plato's philosophy rather than speculative philosophers in their own right. The philosophical concepts of the Neoplatonic school were attributed to Plato and were so thoroughly blended and mingled with the original Platonic creed that the resulting interpretation was true to neither Plato nor the Neoplatonists. But regardless of the inaccuracy of such an interpretation, the important fact is that it was adopted from Taylor by Emerson and became an important influence on his own philosophy. Later, Emerson read other and more accurate translations but for his own use and enjoyment always returned to Taylor. He read for "lustres," not for a scientifically accurate analysis of Plato's thought, and he appreciated the workings of a lively imagination similar to his own on the philosophic concepts expounded in the writings of Plato and his successors. He sought for confirmation of his own ideas or for ideas which he himself could confirm as truth through spontaneous recognition and intuitive perception.

In the opinion of John S. Harrison,

He was not a philosopher building up a system of thought. Hence he did not study the sources of his Platonism as a professed student of that philosophy whose chief aim is the understanding of all the minutiae of

Platonic doctrine. It is impossible therefore to reconstruct from Emerson's writings a system of Platonism; his mind was constitutionally unfitted for the performance of such a task. His independent spirit, too, forbade such a proceeding. He used his books for their service to his own spiritual needs.... And thus in the reading of his Platonic books he attends only to those portions that appeal to him.²⁷

Although Emerson read and studied the Greeks intermittently for the rest of his life, they made only a small portion of his wide reading. Consequently, in the development of his ideas Neoplatonic thought is never used exclusively but is modified by his own thinking and merged with similar ideas from other sources. The mixed nature of Neoplatonism, partaking as much of Oriental thought as of Greek, thus lent itself readily to this sort of modification and adaptation.

(Emerson's beginning interest in Oriental literature coincided approximately with his early interest in the Greeks.) Aunt Mary Moody Emerson was interested in Eastern books as well as in Greek philosophy, and in June, 1822, her nephew wrote her a letter expressing interest in her Hindu mythologies. No great knowledge of Oriental literature is indicated in the verses and entries in the journals of this period, and it seems evident, as Carpenter has noted,

²⁷ The Teachers of Emerson, p. 25.

that Emerson's formative years were spent in comparative ignorance of Oriental thought. His acquaintance with De Gérando's Histoire in 1830, however, led him to study not only the Greeks but also the Orientals. An increasing interest in Oriental thought and literature is indicated by the inclusion of scattered articles and books about the East in his annual reading lists. The Greeks had attracted his attention first and received the greater study, but about 1834 Emerson commenced his serious and more consistent browsing in the Orientals. As has been mentioned previously, however, he was slow to assimilate new ideas into his own philosophy and did so only after long consideration and modification; therefore, his early works contain only vague references to the Orient and its literature.

Although by 1840 he had read Zoroaster, Confucius, the Vedas, the Vishnu Sarna, the Koran, and others, his Oriental reading hardly affected his own published writings at all. In 1842-43 he joined Thoreau in publishing in The Dial a series of "Ethnical Scriptures," selections from the sacred books of the Orient. In spite of his great interest in the Orientals, however, there was as yet little adaptation or assimilation of their thought into his own philosophy, for even the Essays, Second Series (1844)

contain little evidence of Oriental influence. Yet, apparently, by 1845 Emerson had become an Orientalist in earnest, for from that time on he not only makes use of Oriental ideas to illustrate his own thought but transmutes and adapts them to extend the range of his philosophic thinking. The poems "Hamatreya" (1847) and "Brahma" (1857) have been called the culmination of his ability to interpret Oriental thought, and his transmutation and adaptation of Oriental ideas are clearly evident in Representative Men (1850), especially in the "Plato." Most of the other "representative men" are likewise in some way compared with the Orientals. Shakespeare, for example, is said to have shared the supreme poetic quality with the Orientals, whereas Montaigne is cited as a striking contrast to them.

(Perhaps the most "Oriental" of all Emerson's published works, however, is The Conduct of Life (1860), which contains his maturest wisdom and displays the depth of his interest in Oriental philosophy. Beginning with "Fate" and ending with "Illusions," both of which are filled with quotations from Oriental literature, the book is interwoven with Oriental philosophical ideas. Even this book, though, is no exception to the rule, for the Oriental thought contained in it is far from being pure and unadulterated.

Emerson remained true to his own thought throughout his life of study. He took from the Orientals only what he recognized intuitively as the truth, even as he had done earlier with the Greeks and the New Testament writers.

These brief surveys of Emerson's acquaintance with and study of the Platonists, the Neoplatonists, and the Orientals may thus serve to point out an important fact which is often obscured by the over-emphasis on superficial similarities between the Essays and the "sources." There is a consistency in Emerson's borrowings and adaptations from his reading that should not go unnoticed. Whether his reading is in the Bible, in Plotinus, or in the Oriental scriptures, he takes only what is his own, what he himself recognizes by intuitive perception to be true. The same may be said for the innumerable other sources cited by scholars at various times. Thus Montaigne, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Carlyle, and Goethe, to cite only a few writers on Emerson's reading list, although read and studied assiduously by Emerson, exerted little discernible influence upon the formation of his personal philosophy but rather served as sources in which he found his own ideas repeated and confirmed. Suggestive ideas found in them which seemed to be logical corollaries of his own basic concepts were studied, and if

confirmed by his intuitive perception, were modified and adapted to his philosophy, and thus did contribute to the development and enlargement of his philosophical system. In view of Emerson's peculiar method of study, confirmation, modification, and adaptation, the difficulty involved in attempting to designate any particular author or work as a specific source is obvious.

It is not known exactly when Emerson first made the acquaintance of Montaigne's Essays, but by 1832 he had acquired a familiarity with them which was peculiarly intimate if not complete. For the next fifteen years, the most creative period in Emerson's life, Montaigne had a quickening effect on his thought and action, for much in Montaigne confirmed his own thought and experience. So intimate was this reading experience that Emerson was moved to say, "It seemed to me as if I had written the book myself in some former life, so sincerely it spoke my thought and experience. No book before or since was ever so much to me as that."²⁸

As was true of all his other sources, the influence exerted by Montaigne's Essays depended as much on what Emerson read into the Essays as on what he read out of

²⁸Journals, VI, 371-72.

them, for he continued to read for the "lustres," for the flashes of insight inspired by his reading. Primarily, Montaigne's appeal to Emerson's Yankee practicality, however, was as a moralist rather than as a skeptic, and Emerson liked best in Montaigne his broad tolerance, warm humanity, and sound common sense. Yet he was quick to see and to acknowledge the restrictive limits of Montaigne's philosophy. The center of interest in Montaigne's system of morality is the rational control of nature to make a graceful balance or proportion of virtue in a life of ordered completeness. Emerson too claims naturalness in morals to be the mark of sanity and wholesomeness, but he disagreed with Montaigne's view that virtue is the result of a self-directed discipline, a rational control of the senses and natural instincts. Emerson felt that no individual will should intervene between the divine will and its actions; therefore, no conscious discipline is necessary but only complete reliance on the conscience or the God within. Thus, although Emerson liked Montaigne's tolerance and common sense, and accepted his concept of naturalness as the basis of sound morals, he chose to disregard completely Montaigne's self-regulatory discipline as a path to virtue, for the Yankee-mystic could not conceive of the moral life as a struggle involving the conscious

interference of the will with the spontaneous action of the divine force of individuality.

Emerson was, as Bliss Perry has called him, a combination of Yankee and Dreamer-Seer, or what William James has called a "healthy-minded" mystic. Montaigne's naturalness and common sense appealed to the Yankee side of his nature, but for the mystic they were not enough. Although Emerson's own philosophical system goes far beyond that of Montaigne, it is probable that he accepted Montaigne's system as a reasonable guide for the practical conduct of life. Thus Montaigne contributed to the development of Emerson's philosophy, at least on its lower levels, by commending the use of a natural common sense, native to Emerson, which consequently limited his mysticism, organized it, and made it more efficient for the development of a practicable personal philosophy.²⁹

Coleridge was known to Emerson directly through the Aids to Reflection, The Friend, and the Biographia Literaria, and indirectly through the works of Wordsworth and Carlyle, for Coleridge the philosopher had influenced both Wordsworth and Carlyle before Emerson knew their works. In the early journals,

²⁹For an excellent study of Emerson and Montaigne see Charles Lowell Young, Emerson's Montaigne (New York: Macmillan Co., 1941).

especially in the year 1826, there is extensive criticism of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's effort to write a new type of poetry, but Emerson's interest in Coleridge began in the fall of 1829 when he read the Aids to Reflection and The Friend. In 1834 he returned to The Friend and began also to read the Biographia Literaria. There is little doubt that as a result of his reading and study of Coleridge Emerson accepted and adopted the terms "Reason" and "Understanding" and that Coleridge fixed the distinction between them in his mind, but it is likewise evident from many passages in the journals that Emerson was familiar with the ideas behind these terms long before he read the works of Coleridge.

(In 1822, for example, he discusses the Moral Sense as differing from the rational faculties of the mind in that it is not a result of experience but is "coextensive and coeval" with the mind; it is man's inborn guide to perfection and his proof of the existence of God.³⁰)

Even after his adoption of the Coleridgean terms he often uses the terms Moral Sense, Moral Sentiment, and Reason interchangeably. The idea, of course, goes back as far as the earliest history

³⁰Journals, I, 186-88.

of mysticism itself. The Divine Inner Light, Intuition, God-Within, Divine Inspiration, and the Father-In-Me are all terms synonymous with Emerson's "Reason" as adopted from Coleridge, and that sense of communion with and inspiration from God or the Eternal One is always the distinguishing mark of the mystic. The Coleridge-Emerson "Reason" is no different from the Inner Light of the Quakers, of whom Emerson once said: "I believe I am more of a Quaker than anything else. I believe in the still small voice, and that voice is Christ within us."³¹

Wordsworth, although considered by Emerson to be the sanest and most original poet since Milton, contributed little to the formation or development of his philosophy. Emerson found little that was philosophically new or startling in the poetry of Wordsworth, but he liked and appreciated the poetic restatement of mystical or transcendental ideas with which he had long been familiar. Most of all he appreciated the originality of Wordsworth's poetic form and the sanity with which he translated the universal laws perceived beneath the surface of the natural world. The individualistic and revolutionary self-reliance of the elder poet in rebelling against

³¹ Bliss Perry, Emerson Today (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1931), p. 73.

the conventional poetic form and his mystical interpretation of the laws of nature could not fail to strike a responsive chord in the mind of the younger philosopher. Although Wordsworth remained Emerson's favorite poet, even after the eye-opening first continental visit during which Emerson became aware of the limitations of his literary heroes, Wordsworth's influence was again primarily confirmative. All that Wordsworth said, Emerson approved of, but there was much that Wordsworth left unsaid. Consequently, while retaining his respect for Wordsworth the poet, Emerson early recognized and acknowledged the limitations of Wordsworth the philosopher.

(Emerson's first real interest in Carlyle and acquaintance with his works began in the early 1830's with the reading of Carlyle's translation of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister. His interest was aroused even more in 1832 at the appearance of the "Corn-Law Rhymes.") Primarily he was attracted by Carlyle's determination to develop an individualistic style suited to express the inner man. It was also in 1832 that he first became acquainted with the clothes philosophy in Carlyle's Jean Paul Friedrich Richter. In the fall of 1833 he again met this philosophy in greater detail in Sartor Resartus, published in Fraser's Magazine.

In 1834 Emerson's letter of praise in appreciation

of Sartor Resartus initiated the famous correspondence which was to result in a lifetime friendship between these almost completely unlike men, a friendship in which each was to preserve his own unique individuality and at the same time maintain respect for the individuality of the other. Even a casual reading of the correspondence, which passed between them from 1834 to 1872, reveals the difference between the two men. One of the earliest critics of Emerson has summarized this difference in the following observation:

Emerson was the champion of the Ideal; Carlyle asserted the absolute dominion of Fact. Emerson declared that Truth is Mighty, and will prevail; Carlyle retorted that Truth is mighty, and has prevailed. Emerson looked serenely at the ugly aspect of contemporary life, because, as an optimist, he was a herald of the Future; Carlyle, as a pessimist, denounced the Present, and threw all the energy of his vivid dramatic genius into vitalizing the Past. Emerson was a prophet; Carlyle, a resurrectionist. Emerson gloried in what was to be; Carlyle exulted in what had been. Emerson declared, even when current events appeared ugliest to the philanthropist, that "the highest thought and the deepest love is born with Victory on his head," and must triumph in the end; Carlyle, gloomily surveying the present, insisted that high thought and deep love must be sought and found in generations long past, which Dr. Dryasdust had so covered up with his mountains of mud, that it was only by immense toil he (Carlyle) had been able to reproduce them as they actually existed. Look up, says Emerson cheerily; "hitch your wagon to a star;" Look down, growls Carlyle, "and see that your wagon is an honest one, safe and strong in passing over miry roads, before you have the impudence to look up to

the smallest star in the rebuking heavens.³²

In view of the vast difference between the two men, who were by nature opposite, it is evident that Carlyle exerted little or no direct influence on the formation or development of Emerson's basic philosophy, for Carlyle was antipathetic to certain Platonic concepts which were of vital interest to Emerson. It is noteworthy that at the very time he was most interested in Sartor Resartus Emerson returned to the clearer distinctions of Coleridge, who had helped him reconcile Platonism with Transcendentalism.³³ Thus, Emerson was primarily attracted by the uniqueness and individuality of Carlyle's style, his independent and self-reliant attitude, and his bold stand for spiritualism, but in general Carlyle was earth-bound, and Emerson, who wished to soar, soon recognized the philosophical limitations of his friend.

One widening of Emerson's mental horizon, however, is directly attributable to Carlyle, for it was primarily to the efforts of Carlyle that Emerson owed

³²Edwin Percy Whipple, American Literature (Boston: Ticknor and Co., 1887), pp. 241-42.

³³See two admirable studies by Frank T. Thompson: "Emerson and Carlyle," SP, XXIV (July, 1927), 438-53; and "Emerson's Indebtedness to Coleridge," SP, XXIII (January and Carlyle," SP, XXIV (July, 1927), 438-53;

his awakening interest in Goethe. (From 1834 to 1840 Emerson became increasingly interested in Goethe as man and poet. During this period he read not only almost all Goethe's works but also many books by German writers which bore directly or indirectly upon the life and works of this poet. It was not long, however, before he became aware of the same fault in Goethe that he had noticed in Carlyle. Although a man representative of his era, one who comprehended all human knowledge and shared the subjectivity of the time, Goethe too was earth-bound and egoistic, for he sought knowledge only that he himself might benefit. He did not devote himself to pure truth; rather, he devoted himself to truth for the sake of culture. This colossal egoism, although it did not detract from his writings, lowered the moral influence of the man, and in Emerson's opinion the basis for the criterion of all literary criticism is the moral value and not the intellectual. Thus, although Emerson admired Goethe's poise and easy self-reliance, he felt that he dwelt too much in the world of sense and too little in the world of spirit.³⁴)

It is evident, therefore, even in a necessarily incomplete survey, that Emerson continued his method

³⁴See Frederick B. Wahr, Emerson and Goethe (Ann Arbor, Mich.: G. Wahr, 1915).

of reading for confirmation, and that, though not averse to the practical and the common-sensical, he consciously sought for the mystical, the spiritual, and the transcendental. In the works of Montaigne, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Carlyle, Goethe, and other writers, he found much that he could approve and accept or that confirmed ideas of his own, but he found also that in spite of transcendental and spiritual leanings most of these authors chose to make use of their power to perceive certain aspects of Universal Truth underlying the world of Natural Fact only to apply these truths to the partial improvement of the culture and society of this material world. His recognition of the restrictive limitations which had bound most thinkers of the time to the earth merely confirmed to him the value of his own faculty to perceive intuitively truth of a purer nature.

Much that he believed he had found confirmed by other thinkers, but there was likewise much that he perceived to be true for which he could find no confirmation other than that of his own intuition. Finding that there was indeed no other guide, with implicit self-trust and complete reliance upon his perceptive intuition, he proceeded to develop and expand his philosophical system by organizing and assimilating the truths that his intuition perceived

to underlie the world of material fact. This process could not produce a logical, architectural construction of a perfect pyramid of inductive truth, founded on a broad base of perceivable facts and rising to the crowning glory of the Over-Soul. Rather it is an expansive process, beginning with the recognition of the unity of all things centered in the source of all energy, God or the Over-Soul, and then expanding outward in a series of concentric circles of revelatory truths, all emanating from the common center but each differing in degree from the previous one. Thus, all Emerson's philosophical concepts are the results of his applying to them his primary principle of the unity of all things in God. Since all things, both tangible and intangible, emanate from the source of all power and energy, God or the Over-Soul, then duality in the universe is only an illusion, for the One can not in reality be the opposite of itself. Therefore, although a fact may seem to be either good or evil, in reality it is neither; it is merely a fact, no more and no less. From one vantage point it may seem evil, but from the opposite it may seem good. The fact itself remains unchanged, containing the elements of both "good" and "evil." Unity is likewise evident in the law of Compensation, for every fact contains within itself both good and evil. The

apparent evil of a fact is not long attendant upon its accompanying good; thus, in Emerson's meaning, good does grow out of evil. That the opposite is also true is clearly implied by Emerson. It is therefore evident that since a man is himself an individual fact, containing within himself an even balance of good and evil, he should rely only upon himself and his own individual conscience or intuition as a guide for his actions. As the healthy animal instinctively seeks the food its body requires, so man, by relying upon his innate intuition, would do naturally what is right for him.

It would be possible to continue in this vein and to show the essential unity of Emerson's whole philosophical system based on the concept of the Over-Soul and the unity of all things. Basically, it is a system almost without an end, for one could go on and on, finding truth related to truth throughout all the affiliated systems of theology, natural science, economics, and astronomy, eventually finding that a comprehension of the "all" leads back to a realization of the One. For this reason Emerson never claimed to have developed a philosophical system in the ordinary sense of the term. The primary realization of the essential unity of all things, the comprehension of the all in one, was his system. Following the

realization of that fundamental principle, Emerson spent his lifetime applying it to all the truths of experience, to all the facts of the visible world, as they happened to present themselves. There was no necessity for the development of a "system" when all facts, regardless of their nature, fit equally well into his comprehensive scheme. This explains also the eclecticism of his reading and study. To all his sources he applied the primary principle of the unity of all things, taking only what his perceptive intuition recognized as truth.

(The importance of the Bible as the first of the long list of Emerson's sources must not be underrated. Harriet R. Zink has shown that Emerson's many allusions to the Bible were possible only to one whose mind was saturated with knowledge of the Bible.³⁵ Edwin P. Whipple has pointed out that the Emersonian concept of the Over-Soul and the idea of divine influx actually differ little from Jonathan Edwards's orthodox belief in an omnipresent God who communicates with the awakened mind of man.

There are numerous passages in his works which with a simple change of terms would make his doctrine of the "Over-Soul" agree with the orthodoxy of Jonathan Edwards. Substitute

³⁵"Emerson's Use of the Bible," University of Nebraska Studies in Language, Literature, and Criticism, No. 14 (Lincoln, Nebraska: 1935), 1-75.

"Holy Spirit" for "Over-Soul" in his affirmation of the communion of the divine with the human mind, and the heretic becomes almost a Calvinist.³⁶

Perry Miller feels that Emerson's tenet of Intuitive Knowledge does indeed go back to the Calvinist doctrine of regeneration, "the theory that a regenerate soul receives an influx of the divine spirit and is joined to God by a direct infusion of His grace." Citing this doctrine as the source of the Quakers' belief in the possibility of direct mystical communication of all instruction from the spirit within, he shows that there was likewise a mystical element in the New England Calvinist tradition itself which flowered in Jonathan Edwards. Miller finds a distinct strain of mysticism implicit in the thought of Edwards, with suppressed tendencies toward pantheism. Summarizing the thought of the mystical element in Calvinism, he finds that once it is assumed that God is diffused throughout the universe and that therefore the substance of man is also the substance of God, then it naturally follows that man too is divine and that nature is but the garment of the Over-Soul. Since man's spirit is therefore divine, he should be "self-reliant," that is, reliant on the divine spirit within. The only obstruction to this conclusion is the orthodox theo-

³⁶ American Literature, p. 277.

logical concept of the inherent evil of man, thus making his self-reliance a reliance upon his own evil nature. The development of Unitarianism by Channing and Norton, however, although it represented the more cautious and sober side of the New England tradition, opened the way for the development of the mystical and spiritual side of Puritanism by removing such theological dogmas from Calvinism. Emerson, who, after Edwards, was to represent the second flowering of the mystical element in Calvinism, revolted against the conservatism of Unitarianism to develop his own philosophy outside the Church, but still within the tradition.³⁷⁾

That a man is the product of his age and heritage is a sound, logical, Emersonian doctrine that seems applicable to Emerson himself. In view of the evidence presented, it would seem probable that Emerson developed his philosophy in line with one element, at least, of the New England tradition. George W. Cooke, Emerson's earliest biographer and one of his generation, assumes as a matter of course that Emerson is as much intellectually and spiritually the child of his Puritan ancestors as he is physically, and at the close of Cooke's chapter on Emerson's

³⁷"Jonathan Edwards to Emerson," NEQ, XIII (December, 1940), 598-617.

ancestry, he concludes, "So we find him summing up and repeating, with a master's stroke of genius, the life and the thought of all his Puritan ancestors; which has been, in substance, the life and the thought of New England."³⁸

It has been pointed out in the course of this chapter that his earlier writings, his journals, letters, and sermons, reveal that Emerson had formed his philosophical conclusions prior to his reading any of the sources usually cited and, of course, well before the publication of Nature in 1836. Although he had made the usual undergraduate's acquaintance with Plato and the English Platonists at Harvard during the years 1817 to 1820, there is no evidence in the journals of any interest in Platonism until he read De Gerando's Histoire in 1830, which inspired a mild interest in both Platonism and Orientalism. In 1834 the journals show that he had begun a more extensive reading of Platonie, Neoplatonic, and Oriental works, but it is not until 1842, when he came across Thomas Taylor's translations, that their influence on his own thinking and writing becomes noticeable. Indeed, the

³⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson: His Life, Writings, and Philosophy (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1882), p. 15.

influence of his reading in the Oriental scriptures is not apparent in his works until after the publication of the Essays, Second Series in 1844. Consequently, since Nature is acknowledged to contain the essence of his philosophy, it seems evident that nothing read after 1836 can be said to have exerted any influence on the formation of his basic concepts; hence it is logical and proper to look more closely at the Bible as the probable source of these beliefs. Even though it might be argued that Emerson's reading from 1834 to 1836 may have influenced the formulation of his thought in Nature, the following chapters will show that each of his major philosophical concepts was advanced in his sermons, journals, or letters well before 1834 and even before 1830, when he first read De Gérando.

In view of Emerson's thorough acquaintance with the Bible, a vital part of the New England tradition, his early ministerial training, and the presence of concepts in the Bible similar to those found in Neoplatonism and Orientalism, it seems logical to assume that the Bible, and especially the New Testament, is the most probable "original" source of his basic beliefs and exerted the greatest influence upon the formation and early development of his idealistic philosophy. Because of Emerson's background and early

Unitarian religious training, it is essential to the purpose of this study that the New Testament be read and interpreted from the Unitarian point of view, regardless of the personal beliefs of the reader, for it is not the rightness of the interpretation that is in question but the presence of "transcendental" ideas in the scriptures when they are read and studied from Emerson's point of view.

The central core of Emerson's philosophy and the first principle upon which all his other concepts depend is his fundamental belief in the Over-Soul. The purpose of the following chapter is to show that there is a striking similarity and no substantial disagreement between Emerson's conception of the Over-Soul and Jesus's conception of the Father in heaven. When supported by the evidence of the journals and sermons, in which Emerson habitually wrote of the Divine Spirit in Christian terms, this close similarity would seem to be conclusive proof that his conception of the Over-Soul is fundamentally Christian in origin.

II

THE OVER-SOUL

Much significance has been attached to Emerson's use of the term Over-Soul as an indication that his concept of the Universal Spirit or World Soul came from the Oriental scriptures, as the term itself may well have come. Actually, though, it seems to have been but a convenient means of avoiding the use of the word God, which too often failed to convey to audiences prevailingly orthodox his larger conception of the Divine Spirit that pervades and animates the universe. In his private conversations, in his personal letters, and in his journal entries, however, Emerson rather consistently used the terms God or Holy Ghost to indicate the World Soul, but because of the limited connotation of these words he seems to have taken pains to substitute the more expansive and unlimited transcendental terms, such as Over-Soul, Supreme Mind, Divine Essence, Universal Spirit, or Eternal One, in his lectures and written works. For example, compare two passages similar in spirit but decidedly different in terminology, one from his private journal, the other from his published essay "The Over-Soul." The passage from the journal for

the year 1831 is written predominately in conventional Christian terms:

Paul says that his preaching was made effectual to the Gentiles by the same spirit as Peter's preaching to the Circumcision. He saith rightly. There is one light through a thousand stars. There is one spirit through myriad mouths. It will not do to divide or bound what is in itself infinite. Every word of truth that is spoken by man's lips is from God. Every thought that is true is from God. Every right act is from God. All these are as much done by his Spirit as the miracle of the Pentecost, they are of the same sort as that influence. . . . The reason why I insist on this uniformity and universality of spiritual influence is because any other view that can be taken of the Holy Ghost is idolatrous. . . . Men are made to feel as if they ate their dinner and committed their common sins somewhere in the purlieus of the creation, behind a screen, for the Spirit of God works in a church, or in Judea, and not in the vulgar affairs of every day. The Spirit of God teaches us, on the contrary, that not a star rolls in space, that not a pulse beats in a single heart, not a bird drops from the bough, not an atom moves throughout the wide universe, but is bound in the chains of his omnipotent thought, - not a lawless particle. And least of all can we believe - Reason will not let us - that the presiding Creator commands all matter and never descends into the secret chambers of the soul. There he is most present. The soul rules over matter. Matter may pass away like a mote in the sunbeam, may be absorbed into the immensity of God, as a mist is absorbed into the heat of the Sun; but the soul is the kingdom of God: the abode of love, of truth, of virtue.¹

The passage from "The Over-Soul," without the New Testament allusions or Christian terminology but containing an identical philosophical conception of

¹Journals, II, 358-61.

the nature of the Divine Spirit, provides an apt illustration of the manner in which Emerson translates his basic beliefs into transcendental terms with the aid of multiple synonyms to denote God:

When I watch that flowing river, which, out of regions I see not, pours for a season its streams into me, I see that I am a pensioner; not a cause but a surprised spectator of this ethereal water; that I desire and look up and put myself in the attitude of reception, but from some alien energy the visions come.

The Supreme Critic on the errors of the past and the present, and the only prophet of that which must be, is that great nature in which we rest as the earth lies in the soft arms of the atmosphere; that Unity, that Over-Soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart of which all sincere conversation is the worship, to which all right action is submission; that over-powering reality which confutes our tricks and talents, and constrains every one to pass for what he is, and to speak from his character and not from his tongue, and which evermore tends to pass into our thought and hand and become wisdom and virtue and power and beauty. We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE....²

This belief in Unity or the Over-Soul is the fundamental concept in Emerson's philosophy of which all his other philosophical ideas are but logical corollaries and extensions. Although the nature of the Over-Soul is not explained or elaborated on in

²Works, II, 268-69 (Italics mine).

detail until it is treated as a separate topic in the essay of that name, there are numerous references to it throughout his other works which show that it is the underlying principle of all his thinking and that his conception of it was never substantially changed in his later essays. Even though the term Over-Soul proved to be convenient for indicating the all-inconclusive nature of the Divine Spirit, Emerson seldom makes use of it even in the essay itself, preferring to use innumerable synonyms, such as Universal Mind, Divine Intellect, Supreme Spirit, Unity, God, or Soul.

(The fundamental proposition of his concept of the Over-Soul, as it appears in his mature works, is that of Unity and Identity. The Over-Soul is the central Unity which pervades all things, all thought, all living creatures, and is the Universal Spirit of Truth, Justice, Beauty, and Goodness. It is the Heart of the Universe, the Source of all Energy from which emanates the life or essence of all things.)

The ultimate fact we reach, says Emerson in "Self-Reliance," is "the resolution of all into the ever-blessed ONE."³ And in "Compensation" he adds: "Under all this running sea of circumstance, whose waters

³Ibid... p. 70. Works

ebb and flow with perfect balance, lies the aboriginal abyss of real Being. Essence, or God, is not a relation, or a part, but the whole. Being is the vast affirmative, excluding negation, self-balanced, and swallowing up all relations, parts, and times within itself."⁴

God, then, is the center of the universe from which all things emanate. In figurative language, all creation is but the manifestation of the will of God who radiates power and energy to become the sustaining spirit of the universe. "There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning into itself."⁵

Not only is the material world an emanation from God, or a manifestation of his will, but so too the spiritual, esthetic, and abstract qualities are manifestations or reflections of the One. "Truth, and goodness, and beauty, are but different faces of the same All."⁶ Thus all creation, both body and soul, is of God, incarnate or of the spirit. Man's body is a fact emanating from the mind of God, which is sustained and animated by the spirit of God. The

⁴Ibid., pp. 120-21.

⁵"The American Scholar," Works, I, 85.

✓⁶"Nature," Works, I, 24.

material world which man calls real is but a world of illusions, of shadows, seeming real to him only because he himself is a shadow. From his limited point of view, man sees himself and the world as real, but once he attempts to penetrate to the center of all being, to align his point of view with the beams emanating from the central source, all substance loses its former opaqueness and becomes translucent. As a symbol of his conception of the universal scheme, Emerson uses the image of a sphere, with God as its central core. On the outer surface of this sphere is the world of illusion or apparent fact in which the emanating rays from the central Unity take on form. To man this world seems to be of solid substance, for, being himself a part of the visible creation, he sees only what appears to be a solid phalanx of three-dimensional surfaces. Geometrically speaking, he views the world of parallel planes and surfaces from right angles, and all to him therefore seems to be solid. Moreover, says Emerson in "Nature," "There seems to be a necessity in spirit to manifest itself in material forms.... A Fact is the end or last issue of spirit. The visible creation is the terminus or the circumference of the invisible world."⁷

⁷Ibid., pp. 34-35.

Once man changes his point of view and turns his eyes toward the center, toward God, he no longer is looking at right angles to the world of reality, but the world of appearances becomes transparent, and he is able to see along the trajectory to the immediate center of all being, the heart of the universe - Unity and God. He is enabled to do this by virtue of the fact that within him lodges the highest developed form of Divine Reason, for he too is an emanation from God and is sustained by the Divine Spirit. With the application of Reason, he no longer views the world as a composition of individual parts; he sees the All emanating from the One, the visible world sustained by invisible spirit. By relying completely upon his faculty of intuitive perception, or divine revelation, he may collect hints of the transcendent simplicity and energy of the highest law.

At first, however, man can collect only hints of the law; he is unable to see the whole truth. Where he catches a fleeting glimpse of Cause, he sees causes; of Effect, effects. Thus Unity appears to be variety. With the passing of time, his vision will clear; if he continues to seek, he shall find, for from his new vantage point he stands "before the secret of the world, there where Being passes

into Appearance and Unity into Variety."⁸ With complete reliance upon the intuition rather than upon intellect, for "...the blindness of the intellect begins when it would be something of itself,"⁹ he abandons himself to the influx of the Supreme Mind which reveals to him his relationship to all its works and provides him "a royal road to particular knowledges and powers."¹⁰ "In ascending to this primary and aboriginal sentiment," concludes Emerson, "we have come from our remote station on the circumference instantaneously to the centre of the world, where, as in the closet of God, we see causes, and anticipate the universe, which is but a slow effect."¹¹

Thus man collects his hints of the One Law, fragmentary glimpses of truth, and imperfectly interprets them as scientific laws. Even though these laws of matter mirror the laws of moral nature, they are no more than imperfect reflections of the One Law, the will of God, the Over-Soul. For, "That soul which within us is a sentiment, outside of us is a law,"¹² "...a Law which is not intelligent but

⁸"The Poet," Works, III, 14.

⁹"The Over-Soul," Works, II, 271.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 276.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²"Compensation," Works, II, 102.

intelligence; - not personal nor impersonal - it disdains words and passes understanding; it dissolves persons; it vivifies nature; yet solicits the pure in heart to draw on all its omnipotence."¹³ Making use of his spherical symbol for Truth, Emerson says in "Nature:"

The moral law lies at the centre of nature and radiates to the circumference. . . . A rule of one art, or a law of one organization, holds true throughout nature. So intimate is this Unity, that, it is easily seen, it lies under the undermost garment of Nature, and betrays its source in Universal Spirit. For it pervades Thought also. Every universal truth which we express in words, implies or supposes every other truth.... It is like a great circle on a sphere, comprising all possible circles; which, however, may be drawn and comprise it in like manner. Every such truth is the absolute End seen from one side. But it has innumerable sides.¹⁴

Therefore duality is not the real law of the world that it may seem to be; it is but two views of the one fact. Once the primary principle of Absolute Unity is perceived and understood, time and space are seen to be but imperfect hints of eternity and infinity, for "The soul circumscribes all things...; it abolishes time and space."¹⁵ We therefore learn that "Before the revelations of the soul, Time, Space, and Nature

¹³"Fate," Works, VI, 49.

¹⁴Works, I, 41, 44.

¹⁵"The Over-Soul," Works, II, 272.

shrink away,"¹⁶ and that "With each divine impulse the mind rends the thin rinds of the visible and finite, and comes out into eternity, and inspires and expires its air."¹⁷

The basic concept of the Over-Soul is recognized, of course, as another statement of the mystical union with God experienced by practicing mystics throughout the ages. To these men the experience of the presence of God or of union with God is so overwhelming that time and space are obliterated. The few seconds, minutes, or hours of direct communion with God becomes the only reality, the only true life; afterward, mundane life seems unreal in a world composed of illusions and shadows of reality. To many the experience is so all-consuming and so desirable that they devote their lives to experimenting with various disciplines designed to induce the mystical state. To others the experience is so enlightening in its revelation of the truths of eternal life, of the unity of all things in the universe, of the inexpressible joy that such communion with the Father brings, and of the possibility of each and all sharing in this joyful experience if they but open their hearts

¹⁶Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 273.

to receive it, that they are impelled to spread the good news to their fellowmen. The good news or gospel lies in the fact that anyone can participate in this experience, if he earnestly desires to do so. There is no complicated procedure of incantations, ablutions, or offerings required; one has but to open his heart and mind and the Divine Spirit flows in, unobstructed. The Spirit, however, does not enter wherein there is no room; therefore, one must prepare for the experience by ridding himself of all worldly thoughts and cares that might obstruct the influx of the Divine Spirit. All the insignificant things that make up the mundane life, such as trivial preoccupations with sex, food, money, and social position, must be eliminated in preparation for the mystical experience.

Mysticism, as a rule, is individualistic and radical, for, although it may accept the forms and practices of the established religion, it considers its own goal, direct communion with God, the heart of all religious experience. Consequently, most practicing mystics, who have felt impelled to announce their revelations and to teach their Way to Eternal Life, have gathered around them a school of sympathetic disciples which, in time, is either re-absorbed into the established religion or breaks away to become a new sect. Of this class of mystics,

one was Buddha, whose teaching of the Way became a world-wide religion; another was Jesus of Nazareth, who so loved his fellowmen that he gave his life to prove the truth of his teaching. Others, such as St. Augustine and St. Francis of Assisi, were to report their experiences and to promote the participation of others, but only within the restricted limits of a theological system. Still others, probably in the majority, are those who, although enjoying occasional mystical experiences, believe that they are not an immediate end in themselves but are intended to reveal to the participant the real purpose of his existence and thus enable him to lead a better and a fuller life in this world. To this group of practical mystics, Ralph Waldo Emerson would seem to belong, for there is evident in his philosophy some elements of mysticism, and it is not improbable, as some have noted, that he shared in the mystical experience to some extent.

Bliss Perry has observed, for example, that Emerson was a mystic by nature, a combination of Yankee and Dreamer-Seer, and that his primary philosophic beliefs originated in mysticism. All later influences were therefore secondary and merely confirmed the truth of his earlier revelations. In support of his view of Emerson as the natural mystic,

hedged in and influenced by his religious training, his ministerial heritage, and his New England environment, he writes:

If he had never been educated beyond the primary school, had never read Plato and Plotinus, St. Augustine and George Fox and Coleridge, he would still have been a mystic by nature.... The fact that Emerson happened to be well educated, and that all the influences surrounding his early life and his professional studies tended to emphasize the significance of philosophy and religion, are secondary influences confirming, but not originating, the natural bent of his mind.¹⁸

Although possibly the case for Emerson's mysticism is somewhat overstated here, the evidence of an underlying mysticism in his philosophy is obvious enough to warrant at least partial acceptance of Bliss Perry's theory. Emerson's own descriptions of his occasional and irregular inspiration or communication with the Over-Soul resemble so closely the accounts of recognized mystics that it would seem evident that he enjoyed, perhaps involuntarily, the mystical experience. If accepted, this theory would account for Emerson's early dissatisfaction with orthodox interpretations of the message of Jesus, and his satisfaction with his own mystical perception of the truth of the principles expounded by Jesus, for, as he would have expressed it later, the same Spirit that had inspired Jesus to

¹⁸ Emerson Today, pp. 59-60.

utter these truths also inspired Emerson to perceive their meaning. With the widening of his reading after entering Harvard, moreover, he soon found confirmation in the writings of the ancients of the truths that he had perceived and that Jesus had taught. Such books often supported his ideas more by suggestion than by actual statement, for as Perry has noted further, "Emerson's inborn capacity for certain states of the mystical consciousness was doubtless confirmed by some of the books which became his lifelong companions."¹⁹

Throughout his life Emerson retained great love and admiration for the man Jesus, but he felt that the exaggerated importance which had been attached to the person of Jesus had raised a barrier between man and God. The figure of Jesus had replaced the graven images against which Moses had warned his people. Admirable as was his character and worthy of imitation as was his life, his elevation to the rank of God by over-zealous followers had subverted the truths that he taught and had interposed the tragic symbol of the cross between the mind of man and his perception of God. The Son, who had sought only to reveal the truths shown him by the Father, had been raised up as a rival to the Father, through the misunderstanding of his words.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 64.

In "The Divinity School Address," Emerson unhesitatingly accuses orthodox Christianity of having subordinated the doctrine of the soul to a worship of the person of Jesus. Disregarding his teachings, but reverencing Jesus the teacher, orthodoxy has imposed its own narrow-minded interpretation of his message upon all who profess themselves Christians, and by its actions has made the friend of man the injurer of man.

(Emerson felt, however, that he had penetrated the veil of orthodoxy surrounding the words of Jesus in the New Testament, had recognized the mystical kinship of Jesus, and had perceived the underlying truth of his actual statements. Jesus belonged to the true race of prophets, says Emerson in the "Address," and saw with open eye the mystery of the soul. As such Jesus was unique in history for his estimation of the potential greatness of the common man. In short, continues Emerson,

One man was true to what is in you and me. He saw that God incarnates himself in man, and evermore goes forth anew to take possession of his World. He said, in this jubilee of sublime emotion, "I am divine. Through me, God acts; through me, speaks. Would you see God, see me; or see thee, when thou also thinkest as I now think." But what a distortion did his doctrine and memory suffer in the same, in the next, and the following ages! There is no doctrine of the Reason which will bear to be taught by the Understanding. The understanding caught this high chant from the poet's lips, and said, in the next age, "This was Jehovah come down out of heaven. I will kill you, if you say he was

a man." The idioms of his language and the figures of his rhetoric have usurped the place of his truth; and churches are not built on his principles, but on his tropes.²⁰

That Emerson early felt the principles taught by Jesus to be mystical and eternal truths is evident, for they are noted in his early journals, they form the themes of his sermons, and they are the fundamental concepts around which he builds his whole personal philosophy, a form of mystical idealism to be identified later with transcendentalism. Throughout his written work these basic concepts do not appear to change substantially; they grow and develop, but the principles remain the same.

It is true that in his early sermons these ideas are clothed in conventional ministerial language, but they are never concealed beneath their orthodox garments. As he continued to preach he became increasingly aware that such conventional terms could never convey his real ideas to an orthodox congregation, and in the later sermons he made greater use of mystical or transcendental terms. Following his separation from the church in 1832, he continued to preach the same doctrines in the form of lectures, but from a different text, abandoning the Bible almost completely because of its orthodox limitations. It has been well said

²⁰"The Divinity School Address," Works, I, 128-29.

that Emerson, although he surrendered his parish, never abandoned his profession, for he resigned from the Unitarian church only to become minister to a larger congregation, the World Church of the Soul.

The most noticeable difference between the early sermon and the later lecture is that, whereas in the former his ideas are supported by Biblical texts, in the latter they are supported by quotations from secular sources. The ideas are recognizably the same, only developed further; the organization is similar, seemingly haphazard and consisting mainly of a series of apothegmatic sentences all turned toward the central concept of his discourse. The lectures, after further revision and development, became the published essays which represent the final stage in the growth of the central principles of his philosophy. Thus, the fully developed philosophical concepts presented by Emerson in the Essays are seen to be the natural fruit of the seeds implanted in his mind by his early study of the New Testament, having undergone a certain amount of refinement and expansion but no radical change.

These fundamental principles, which seem basically mystical, may be easily perceived in the New Testament when it is read and interpreted from the point of view which seems logically to have been Emerson's. First,

it may be seen that Emerson and Jesus agree on the nature of the Divine Spirit, and that essentially the Over-Soul and the Father in heaven are the same.

Jesus, having undoubtedly experienced often the mystical union with God, has perceived, as have other mystics, that God is not the distant and formidable law-giver that the priests have proclaimed him to be, not the passionless Creator of animated puppets, but is instead the loving Father of all his creation. Neither is he a distant king enthroned in the far-off heavens, but rather he is a spirit with whom men may commune if they but know the way. The universe is composed of the World of the Flesh, or the material world, and the World of the Spirit, which is the kingdom of God. Man, too, is of the flesh and of the spirit, of body and of soul. Thus, the kingdom of God is within, and to enter the kingdom, to commune with God, man has but to live the life of the spirit, to live in the soul rather than in the body. Man's soul is divine, is of God, and the divinity of the souls of all men is the golden link which unites them in brotherhood. The Divine Spirit is within all men, if they will but recognize it.

(In words now long familiar, Jesus announced his doctrine that:

God is a Spirit; and they that worship him

must worship him in spirit and in truth.²¹

It is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.²²

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth: whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.²³

For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.²⁴

In a passage in "Nature," Emerson repeats the thought and echoes the very words of Jesus in his description of the Universal Soul:

Man is conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life, wherein, as in a firmament, the natures of Justice, Truth, Love, Freedom, arise and shine. This universal soul he calls Reason.... That which intellectually considered we call Reason, considered in relation to nature, we call Spirit. Spirit is the Creator. Spirit hath life in itself. And man in all ages and countries embodies it in his language as the FATHER.²⁵

Emerson's concept of Unity and the Over-Soul is even more explicit in Paul's interpretation of the message of Jesus:

²¹John 4:24.

²²John 6:63.

²³John 14:16-17.

²⁴John 5:26.

²⁵Works, I, 27.

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.²⁶

Thus the mystical Jesus has perceived that behind this material world is the world of spirit and that God himself is a spirit, a spirit of truth, justice, and beauty. Jesus continually disclaims authorship of the divine truths he utters and proclaims the divine origin of his thoughts. His truths come not from philosophical reasoning but from "the Father that dwelleth in me;" in terms less poetical, they may be said to come from the divine faculty of intuitive perception of truth, which is within. That Jesus does not restrict this intuitive faculty to himself, but recognizes that it is within the power of all men, if properly encouraged, is evident from the advice he gives to his followers:

And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.²⁷

That the term Holy Ghost refers to the Spirit of God and not to the last third of the trinity is made clear

²⁶ Ephesians 4:4-6.

²⁷ Luke 12:11-12.

in another instance by the scribe, who adds,

(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)²⁸

And on still another occasion, Jesus says:

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.²⁹

Paul is the New Testament writer most often quoted in the journals and the one most often mentioned in the essays. The reason for Emerson's admiration of this energetic apostle may well lie in the essential agreement of their interpretations of the message of Jesus, for Paul, when read as Emerson would read him, seems to anticipate many of the "transcendental" concepts advanced by Emerson in his essays. He repeatedly preaches the doctrine of the Father-within to the members of the new church in terms suggestive of the language later used by Emerson.

What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?³⁰

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given, by the Spirit, the word of wisdom;

²⁸ John 7:39.

²⁹ John 14:10.

³⁰ I. Corinthians 6:19.

to another the word of knowledge, by the same Spirit....³¹

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.³²

According to these statements, Paul and Emerson seem to agree in their interpretation of the message of Jesus, that every man has within him a faculty which, if properly encouraged, will enable him to perceive the truth. In most men, if not all, the divine intuition has been so long unrecognized and has been so long smothered by the ways of the world and the desires of the flesh that it is but a spark, yet it cannot be completely quenched. The way back to the life of the spirit is not hard, for one need only ask and it shall be given, seek and it shall be found. For,

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?³³

It is not enough merely to ask, however; the spark of divinity within must be encouraged and exercised. Every victory over the flesh and the

³¹I. Corinthians 12:7-8.

³²II. Timothy 3:16-17.

³³Luke 11:13.

material world furnishes strength for the next struggle until finally the individual has developed to the stage at which he may enjoy the mystic experience. When that state of being at one with the Divine Spirit has been attained, then the kingdom of God is at hand, for the material world has ceased to exist as a barrier between the soul and eternal life.

Unity with God, therefore, to Emerson, as to Jesus, is the desired end of all human life, for it is the elimination of the material world and the living of the spiritual life. It may be accomplished in the hereafter, but the good news of the gospel is that it can be attained now. The purpose of Jesus in preaching his doctrine was to bring eternal life to the world of walking dead and to open the eyes of those blinded by the physical wants of the flesh to perceive the true Good, the life of the spirit.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.³⁴

This is the theme of all the sayings of Jesus, that the doctrine he teaches, verified by his own experience, brings true life to man, the life of the

³⁴John 5:24-25.

spirit, which is eternal, for the one who follows it is at one with the Eternal One. Convinced of the divinity of his own soul as well as the divinity and potential infinity of the souls of all men, he does not hesitate to call himself the Son of God. And as he carefully explains to a group of angry Jews who resent his identification of himself with the Father, all those who do the will of God are likewise Sons of God.

Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.³⁵

That Paul interprets this saying of Jesus in a similar manner is evident in his advice to the Phillippians:

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings; That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God....³⁶

All men are therefore potentially Sons of God, if they but follow the dictates of their divine

³⁵John 10:34-38.

³⁶Phil ippians 2:13-15.

conscience, their innate ability to know the will of God. The cause for rejoicing lies in this fact, that the kingdom is at hand, that it is possible to enter the kingdom here and now, for the kingdom of God is the attainment of complete union with God.

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.³⁷

The spiritual essence of God and the infinitude of man are the two major factors common in the teachings of Jesus and the philosophy of Emerson. Beneath the Emersonian phraseology of his published works, these fundamental Christian ideas are readily apparent, often echoing the very words Jesus used. In the concluding portion of "Nature," both Emerson and his "certain poet" seem to paraphrase the central doctrine of Jesus's teachings and his definition of the kingdom of heaven. Having lamented the fact that man now applies to nature only half his force by working on the world with his Understanding alone, Emerson cites the history of Jesus as one of those "gleams of a better light, - occasional examples of the action of man upon nature with his entire force, - with reason as well as understanding."³⁸ Then, in a mixture of Christian and

³⁷ Luke 17:20-21.

³⁸ Works, I, 72-73.

transcendental terminology, he states his doctrine, which agrees substantially with that of Jesus:

The problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty is solved by the redemption of the soul. The ruin or the blank that we see when we look at nature, is in our own eye. The axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things, and so they appear not transparent but opaque. The reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is because man is disunited with himself. He cannot be a naturalist until he satisfies all the demands of the spirit.... Then shall come to pass what my poet said: "Nature is not fixed but fluid. Spirit alters, moulds, makes it. The immobility or bruteness of nature is the absence of spirit.... Every spirit builds itself a house, and beyond its house a world, and beyond its world a heaven. Know then that the world exists for you.... Build therefore your own world. As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions.... The kingdom of man over nature, which cometh not with observation, - a dominion such as now is beyond his dream of God, - he shall enter without more wonder than the blind man feels, who is gradually restored to perfect sight."³⁹

(The knowledge of truth, therefore, is to be attained by the passive yielding of the human intellect to the educated Will, to the instantaneous in-streaming power of Reason. The aim is the redemption of the soul, the creation of the kingdom of the spirit through the purification of the soul. The worlds of the flesh and of the spirit are, to Emerson, the worlds of Understanding and of Reason. The moral life, or the kingdom of heaven, is to be achieved only through the exercise of the God-

³⁹Ibid., pp. 73-77.

given faculty of Reason.

Thus it may be seen that the Over-Soul and the Father in heaven differ only slightly in the minds of Jesus and Emerson. In both cases, God is a spirit, the divine essence that permeates all things and the souls of men. To be at one with this Divine Spirit is the greatest happiness of men, for it is to enter into the world of true reality, the kingdom of God. The spiritual realization of one-ness with God, or of union with the Eternal One, is to be achieved only by following the dictates of the divine promptings from within. Once achieved, it is the source of eternal happiness and life; it is both the moral life and the kingdom of heaven. All evil or ugliness of the apparent world has been erased or shown to be nonexistent, and only truth, beauty, justice, and virtue remain, all attributes of the One God.

It has been said that Nature contains all Emerson's philosophy in miniature. The same should be said of his early sermons, some of which precede the publication of Nature by ten years. The publication of Nature in 1836 began the public career of Emerson as writer, lecturer, and philosopher, it is true, but it also marked the end of an earlier period of intensive thought, extensive reading, and crucial decisions. All the major philosophical ideas contained

in Emerson's first publication may be found in various stages of development in his early sermons. Hence Nature is the compendium of all his fundamental philosophical ideas, marking the end of his first period of study and determination of basic principles, and serving as an index to his later philosophy, which was mainly an extension and development of the primary principles contained in Nature and worked out still earlier in the sermons.

The basic concept or doctrine of Unity or the Over-Soul is explicit throughout the sermons of Emerson, although the terms employed are usually conventional enough. In fact, the reader often feels that Emerson's occasionally vehement sincerity is due to a sense of frustration at not being able to make the conventional terms mean more to his orthodox congregation, for whenever he speaks of Jesus and his message, he varies these terms with such "transcendental" terms as "Divine Mind," "Supreme Wisdom," and "Eternal One." On one occasion he confesses to the congregation, "My friends, you are so familiar with the words 'faith in God' and so accustomed to hear as things of course what is said in the pulpit, that I hardly can hope to get for this thought that freshness of effect which even the oldest thought will derive from the effort

to bring it home to our own mind."⁴⁰

The doctrine of the Over-Soul is most clearly indicated in Emerson's accounts of Jesus in his presentation of the teachings of Jesus. It is apparent that Emerson's Jesus is not the orthodox Messianic God on earth, but is instead a fellow man elevated to the rank of Son of God because of the purity of his life, the universal truth of his utterances, and his attainment of the closest possible human approximation of the nature of God. In 1830, in a sermon on "The Authority of Jesus," he asks why it was that Jesus spoke with an authority which others of more worldly power and prestige had never obtained, and replies, "I conceive it was because he taught truth, and the supreme kind of truth, ...with greater fidelity and distinctness than any other; ...because, speaking on his own convictions, he expressed with unexampled force, the great laws to which the human understanding must always bow, whilst it retains its own constitution...."⁴¹

Speaking of Jesus's message and its accompanying authority and power, he says in the same sermon:

⁴⁰"The Choice of Theisms" (1831), Young Emerson Speaks, ed. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1938), p. 158.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 91-92.

He spoke of God in a new tongue, not as the philosophers had done, as an intellectual principle, nor as the vulgar had done, as a cruel or sensual demon, but in terms of earnest affection as being best understood by us as the Father of the human soul, the grand object of all thought, and that the end of life was a preparation of the soul to approach him by likeness of character. Humility, love, self-denial, were the means of approaching him.... To have them was to have life....⁴²

Whosoever, therefore, teaches this truth participates of its authority, whosoever speaks it out of a soul over which it has full dominion, must speak as a God unto men, for he utters the word of God.... A tone of authority cannot be taken without truths of authority.... It proceeds directly from the perception of great principles.... No, real power is in that command of truth which can pour light through the soul. He that can reveal to me the great secrets of my own nature which I see to be true the moment they are disclosed, will have a deeper influence on me than he who chains my limbs or feeds me or who heals my disease.⁴³

Having assigned the authority of the doctrines of Jesus to the truth contained in them and not to the person of Jesus, Emerson then defines the Messianic office of Jesus as that of a divine messenger of Truth rather than that of a God on earth arbitrarily commanding men to do his bidding. "A great error to which we are liable on this subject," he says, "is, that we are apt to separate the truth taught by Jesus from his office, and suppose that it was his divine authority, his peculiar designation to the office of

⁴²Ibid., p. 92.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 95-96.

Messiah that gives authority to his words, and not his words that mark him out as the Messiah. The utterance of that truth is his office. It is his truth that made him Messiah."⁴⁴

Jesus, then, in Emerson's opinion, was but the human channel through which Moral Truth made itself known to men. Such truth, he claims, is common property, belonging to no one person; it is the property of all who actively seek it, and several before and after Jesus, have perceived and announced it. Of them all, Jesus was one of the most perceptive, but he was not the only one.

The next consideration of much importance is that as this authority belonged to this truth and not to any person, so it is not confined to the pure and benevolent Founder of Christianity but may and must belong to all his disciples in that measure in which they possess themselves of the truth which was in him.... And thus many a disciple in different ages of the Church hath learned of Christ so much of his truth, hath had infused into his soul so much of his master's spirit that he hath spoken with a large measure of his master's authority.... And all of us receive and understand and impart the same truth as we keep his commandments.... At last when truth has had its whole effect on our minds, it will gain its fulness of authority by becoming to us simply the echo of our own thought. We shall find we think as Christ thought. Thus we shall be one with him, and with him are with the Father.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 96.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 97-98.

The truth that Jesus announces is neither new nor particular to his person. Truth itself is ageless, eternal, and ever-present, waiting only to be witnessed and proclaimed by perceptive men. Many aspects of truth have been glimpsed and announced in the past, only to be quickly forgotten by those who were unable themselves to perceive truth. It is being revealed in the present, and further revelation will come in the future. To paraphrase the words of Jesus, Before man was, truth is. As Emerson states in a sermon of 1831, "Self and Others,"

This great doctrine that God dwells in the human heart in a manner so intimate that it is because he there is present, that we exist, so that a man is not so much an individual as a manifestation of the Eternal and Universal One, is no new or peculiar doctrine.... For before Christ had declared the character of God and his relations to the human mind, humble and thoughtful men had yet communed with their Maker and rejoiced in the conviction that God dwelt within them.⁴⁶

Emerson feels that the conviction that God dwells within and that the light of the soul is truth, the teacher of mankind, is the central doctrine of the teachings of Jesus. He says further that it is the fundamental principle of all philosophy, all religion. It had been known before Jesus, it may be perceived now, and will gradually be revealed even more in the

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 133.

future, but, even as with Jesus, the statement of this basic principle comes always from the primary affirmation of the heart. It is ever new because truth is eternal. It is ever present because truth is the moral law, the sustaining spirit of the universe; it is of God and is God in that it is an attribute of God.)

In view of his strong and positive interpretation of the central doctrine of the message of Jesus, it is not strange that Emerson should adopt it as the fundamental principle of his own philosophy. It is essentially the "transcendental" concept of the Over-Soul stated in orthodox Christian terms. In his sermons of the early 1830's two important facts are evident: (1) that the immediate source of his concepts and beliefs is decidedly the Bible and specifically the New Testament, (2) that all the basic principles of the idealistic Emersonian philosophy recorded in his published works were by this date fully determined and firmly fixed in his mind. In a sermon entitled "Self-Culture," for example, delivered in the year 1830, Emerson presents to his congregation a summary of his religious beliefs that could well serve as a table of contents for the lean little volume he was to publish six years later and as a blueprint for his whole later philosophy. The reader easily may find

in this sermon many of the concepts and beliefs with which he has long been familiar in the published essays.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ...withdraws man from looking for his motives to the world, outward, and directs him to look within. It shows him a Divine Eye that cannot be deceived, that fixed within his soul, commands a perfect prospect of his whole being, all he does, and all he wills, - and passes judgment upon all. It teaches him to conform all his actions to this superior will; for this is God working in him, both to will and to do. It teaches him that some things perish, and that other things never die. It shows him that truth and right are of God everlasting, and impart their own eternity to the soul that embraces them with its affections. It is in the power of man, so far as, obeying this voice, he puts aside the force of vulgar motives, and refusing the service of his senses, subjects himself to the law of his mind, - puts off, so to speak, his human nature, and puts on the divine nature, - it is in his power to obtain a degree of participation... in the attributes of God; to enter into that peace and joy, that unmingled delight in goodness and that universal love which are in Him; and, so entirely to apply his own spirit to the Divine Mind, that he shall be, as it has been expressed, a drop in that Ocean, moving with him, acting with him, partaking of his felicity.⁴⁷

At the risk of pointing out the obvious, it might be mentioned that Emerson, on his own word, has arrived at these beliefs as a result of his study and interpretation of the revelation and message of Jesus. The main concept, of course, is that of God within, the

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 100.

Divine Eye, or the Over-Soul, which is the animating spirit of man and the conscience or judge of all he does. Jesus teaches true self-reliance, reliance upon the God within, or conformity of all actions to the superior will. Related to these major beliefs are such secondary ideas familiar to the student of Emerson as (1) the positive nature of good, (2) the potential infinitude of individual man, and (3) man's close relationship to all creation. By obeying the voice within him, his perceptive intuition, man may eventually share in the attributes of God. This very fact implies also a law of compensation that effectively rewards and punishes the individual's obedience or disobedience of the law of his mind, by increasing or decreasing the amount of his virtue and his participation in the attributes of God. Thus it may be seen that the central principles of Emerson's philosophy, as it is known to the readers of his later essays, were fixed and fully determined before he had read to any great extent the writings of either the Neoplatonists or the Orientals. Although he first became acquainted with De Gérando's Histoire in 1830, there is little or no evidence of any overt influence upon his philosophical thought occasioned by De Gerando's book until after the publication of Nature in 1836. For the most part, Emerson's reading of both Greek and

Oriental works at this time was haphazard and desultory. Therefore, it is all the more important to notice the close parallel in idea and phrasing evident between the excerpt quoted above and random passages selected from his essay "Self-Reliance." The ideas are the same, the phrasing is similar, and the whole effect is to show Emerson's own reliance upon the New Testament as the ultimate source of his philosophical concepts, for he has done little more than to substitute idealistic and "transcendental" terms for the conventional Christian terms employed in the sermon. Speaking of the Over-Soul and the individual, he says,

What is the aboriginal Self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded? ... The inquiry leads us to that source, at once the essence of genius, of virtue, and of life, which we call Spontaneity or Instinct.... In that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their common origin. For the sense of being which in calm hours arises, we know not how, in the soul, is not diverse from things, from space, from light, from time, from man, but one with them and proceeds obviously from the same source whence their life and being also proceed. ... When we discern justice, when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams.⁴⁸

Again, in a virtual paraphrase of the sentence in the sermon, "...truth and right are of God everlasting, and impart their own eternity to the soul that embraces

⁴⁸Works, II, 63-64.

them with its affections," he says: "The soul raised over passion beholds identity and eternal causation, perceives the self-existence of Truth and Right, and calms itself with knowing that all things go well."⁴⁹

Drawing the same moral conclusion for the benefit of his audience, and incidentally illustrating the positive nature of good, the cumulative effect of virtue, and the workings of the law of Compensation in the realm of individual goodness, he adds: "If we cannot at once rise to the sanctities of obedience and faith, let us at least resist our temptations...."⁵⁰

Having shown his congregation that the revelation of Jesus taught the presence of truth and moral law within the individual soul, Emerson continued to emphasize in his sermons that the revelation of truth did not end with the life of Jesus. The gradual revelation of truth is a continuous process, without beginning and without end, for it is both eternal and infinite. Anticipating the theme of Nature that all things in the world are witnesses of the truth if rightly understood, and that all men may understand and perceive the truth if they will but listen to the divine wisdom within, he informs his audience in a

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 69.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 72.

sermon entitled "Religion and Society," delivered in 1833, that

Truth endures and is manifested every moment from day to day, from age to age, ever since the crimson light of the first morning awoke the first man, the Almighty Father accumulates knowledge in the mind of the race; from endless sources - from continual communication - from tradition, from scripture, from comparison of events, from personal experience, from every one of countless occurrences the growing treasure is poured into the world, as the globe itself receives the rays of millions of stars which beam upon it from all the concave firmament around. The Teacher is one, namely, the Spirit of truth; but He speaks by a thousand thousand lips, in all countries, in public and in private places, to mankind. . . . The Teacher is teaching but has not finished his word. That word never will be finished. It was before the heavens and shall be after them. But a part of this message is spoken this day and every day. There are truths now being revealed.⁵¹

In a short sermon on "Astronomy" in 1832, a year earlier, he had claimed that all the laws and discoveries of science only reveal and confirm previous revelations of truth and that one of the most important results of the study of astronomy has been to correct and exalt man's view of God and to humble man's view of himself, for the final effect of these contemplations upon the doctrine of the New Testament "is not contradiction but correction.... It proves the sublime doctrine of One God, whose offspring we all are and whose care we all are.... It abridges what belongs to persons, to

⁵¹ McGiffert, Young Emerson Speaks, pp. 194-99.

places and to times but it does not touch moral truth...."⁵²

Thus all things and all nature bear testimony to the omnipresence of the Divine Spirit and gradually reveal to the mind of man eternal truth. It is evident that as early as 1829 he considered everything in nature to be emblematic of some moral truth, of truth within the soul of the individual, for in phrasing as typically "Emersonian" as anything in his later essays he informs his listeners, in a brief sermon on "Summer," that "there is more in nature than beauty; there is more to be seen than the outward eye perceives. ... The Scripture is always appealing to the tree and the flower and the grass as the emblems of our mortal estate.... There is nothing in external nature but is an emblem, a hieroglyphic of something in us."⁵³

Seven years later, in 1836, he was often to repeat the same idea in Nature: The world is emblematic; the laws of moral nature answer to those of matter as face to face in a glass; every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Nature is a discipline of the Understanding in intellectual truths.

What man must realize, urges Emerson, is that the

⁵²Ibid., p. 177.

⁵³Ibid., p. 44.

divine insight which enables him to perceive truth in and throughout all things, and that truth which is perceived, are both from and of God. Thus all is one, and each is but a variant manifestation of the Eternal and Universal One. The seer and the seen are ultimately one. The truth perceived in nature by the perceptive individual is but the circular reflection of the truth within himself. Scientists who seek to learn truth through the exercise of the Understanding and the accumulation of physical facts, a process generally known as inductive reasoning, are in the frustrated position of the dog driven by an intense desire to pursue and catch the end of its own tail. There is great excitement in the chase, and the exercise is marvelously beneficial, but the end result is a tremendous loss of energy without any perceptible advancement toward the goal. For more productive results, one has only to sit quietly in meditation and contemplate - himself. The truth is within the seeker. Speaking of the personal satisfaction and comfort that the realization of this fact brings to the scholar, and incidentally revealing the key by which he read and interpreted the Scriptures, Emerson sums up his beliefs in the sermon "Religion and Society:"

Man begins to hear a voice in reply that fills the heavens and the earth, saying, that God is within him, that there is the celestial host. I find that this amazing revelation of my immediate relation to God, is a solution to all the doubts that oppressed me.... It is the door of my access to the Father.... It is the perception of this depth in human nature - this infinitude belonging to every man that has been born - which has given new value to the habits of reflexion and solitude.... And let me add that in this doctrine as deeply felt by him, is the key by which the words that fell from Christ upon the character of God can alone be well and truly explained. Read by the torch of this faith, it seems to me, those discourses shine with heavenly meaning. The Father is in me - I in the Father. Yet the Father is greater than I.⁵⁴

The Spirit of God which is the Father-within is also the sustaining spirit of the universe, and as man is composed of body and soul, so too is all the world composed of body and soul, the material and the spiritual. The body and the material world are mutable, transient, and are limited by the bounds of time and space. The soul and the spiritual world are immutable, eternal, and infinite. In one of his earliest sermons, delivered in 1826, Emerson announces to his congregation this fundamental concept of his now familiar idealistic philosophy: "It ought to be distinctly felt by us that we stand in the midst of two worlds, the world of matter and the world of spirit. Our bodies belong to one; our thoughts to the other. It has been one of the best

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 200.

uses of the Christian religion to teach, that the world of spirits is more certain and stable than the material universe."⁵⁵

Four years later, in 1830, he develops the thought even further in the sermon "How Old Art Thou?" which contains the essence of the teachings of Jesus as understood by Emerson.

There is a spiritual world which is immutable, the kingdom of love, of truth, the kingdom of God - which is incorruptible and cannot grow old. The cause of all order, the source of all good it is in the world and the world is made by it, yet the world knows it not. But the soul of man must live in it or it hath no life.... In the spiritual world only can we live. In this world we die daily. The Scripture . . . calls nothing else, life, but that life. It calls the entering on that state by men, a passage from death unto life.... It teaches the soul to seek for life in itself as the Father hath life in Himself. And what is the life that Jesus means? His truth alone. "The words that I speak unto you," said he, "they are spirit and they are life." That soul only has entered into life that has found out, that God's will is better than its own; that humility is better than pride; that to seek another's good is better than to seek its own; that to be good is to do good; that a perfect trust in God gives more contentment than the greatest possessions.... Then does man emerge out of the finite into the infinite; out of time into eternity.⁵⁶

The central doctrine of the teachings of Jesus, as Emerson interprets them, then, is that God is a Spirit, a Spirit who is present in all things,

⁵⁵"Pray Without Ceasing," ibid., pp. 1-2.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 113-14.

especially in the hearts and souls of men. The Divine Spirit is the source of all energy, the source of all good, and the soul of the universe. The individual souls of men are but part of this Universal Soul that animates the physical world. All science, all philosophy, all religion, all the laws of the material world, and all nature itself bear witness to the presence of an eternal, all-powerful, sustaining Divine Power underlying the surface appearances of the material world. Truth, beauty, and good are but different aspects of this Eternal One. All things are unified in the Unity of God.

The soul of individual man, that part of the Divine Spirit which dwells within him, not only identifies him with the world of the spirit but also enables him to perceive the immanence of the Spirit in all things. The divinity within him recognizes the divinity without. Again, since the soul of man is divine, and since man has a direct channel to the source of all truth, by turning his eyes inward and by leading the spiritual life, man is enabled to perceive more and more of eternal truth, of divine wisdom, and of God himself.

Since God is the source of all energy, of all good, truth, and beauty, and is the sustaining spirit of the universe, then the world of appearances is only

an illusion, a superficial manifestation of the will of the Spirit that lies behind it. Thus, there is a World of the Flesh, a world of illusion, and there is the World of the Spirit, the world of reality. The body of man is of the flesh, but the soul within him is of the Spirit. Therefore the kingdom of God, the World of the Spirit, lies within him.

This, then, is essentially the concept of Unity and the Over-Soul in its initial stages. God, the Spirit that animates the universe, resides in the hearts and souls of men. Man's divine soul in the form of Intuition enables him to perceive Truth, which is but another aspect of God. In his later essays Emerson makes use of the term Over-Soul, which proved to be more convenient for his purposes, to denote his conception of the Divine Spirit, but there is no essential difference in the concept itself. The term intuition is but a scientific variant of the Divine Eye within man, to which he often refers in the sermons. The concept of the Over-Soul is so clearly evident throughout his sermons and in his interpretation of the teachings of Jesus that it would seem to prove conclusively that this fundamental principle of his transcendental philosophy could have originated only from his intensive study of the doctrines presented in the New Testament, for at this time his acquaintance

with the Neoplatonic and Oriental writings was only superficial, and they exerted little or no discernible influence until well after the publication of Nature in 1836.

III

SELF-RELIANCE

✓ (The doctrine of Self-Reliance is a natural corollary and a logical extension of Emerson's primary concept of the Over-Soul, the Divine Spirit that sustains the visible universe and resides in the hearts of men. If the soul of individual man is the presence of God within, and if intuition is a faculty of this divine soul, as Emerson's concept of the Over-Soul implies, then man has no choice but to rely on the dictates of his own intuition as the only source of real knowledge. What others report of the nature of truth, beauty, and moral virtue may well be true for them, but it can only be hearsay for him. As an individual he is unique, and he can rely only on himself, his real self, to ascertain truth. The real self is the soul, the perceiver and revealer of truth, for according to the law of affinity of like unto like the divinity within man recognizes the divinity without. Thus, in brief, reliance on self is reliance upon the God-within, and individual man must no longer take things at second hand but must be his own witness to the truth.)

According to his son, Emerson's essay on Self-

Reliance was objected to by some of his contemporaries as being the lowest note in his philosophy,¹ but when read rightly in relation to his concept of the Over-Soul it becomes the highest, for his point is not the reliance upon the egocentric, physical self, but upon the real self, the soul, the God-within. That such is his meaning is implied throughout the essay and in other works, but he explains specifically in his address on "The Fugitive Slave Law," to the citizens of Concord in 1851, that "self-reliance, the height and perfection of man, is reliance on God."²

The faculty of the individual soul which enables man to perceive truth is often variously identified by Emerson as Reason, Intuition, Faith, Imagination, or Intellect, but actually, rather than being "faculties" of the soul, these seem to be more the "actions" of the soul or the soul itself. If, then, these terms are but synonyms for soul, they are likewise synonyms for the Divine Spirit of which the soul is but a part, and consequently, from the apparent variety of "faculties" we return to the starting point, Unity and the Over-Soul, or God. Emerson

¹Edward W. Emerson, Emerson in Concord: A Memoir (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1889), p. 250.

²Works, XI, 236.

makes little or no distinction in his use of the terms and often uses "soul" as a common denominator for many of them. In "Nature," for example, he specifically identifies the various aspects of "soul" as Reason, Spirit, and God:

Man is conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life.... This universal soul he calls Reason.... That which intellectually considered we call Reason, considered in relation to nature, we call Spirit.... And man in all ages and countries embodies it in his language as the FATHER.³

The distinction that he makes between Reason and Understanding is the same as that between the Spiritual and the Material worlds. As Understanding is of the flesh, so Reason is of the spirit. Understanding comprehends truths, but Reason perceives Truth. Since every material fact comprehended by the Understanding is an emblem of a spiritual fact, the function of the Understanding is to comprehend and relate the laws of the visible universe so that Reason may interpret and translate these material facts into its own spiritual realm of thought. This is not done consciously by the Understanding, however, for Understanding is concerned only with the world of nature. It is man's faculty of earthly judgment by which he measures, divides, multiplies, and judges the things of this

³Works, I, 27.

world.

Since the only agents of the Understanding are the senses, which are restricted to the perception of sensible objects in a material world, all natural objects appear to the Understanding to be the ultimate end of their being. Reason, however, aided by imagination and affection, is able to pierce the surface and to perceive the spiritual cause underlying the material effect. Thus, although Reason according to its divine nature may have intuitive and unconfirmed hints of truth, it will find actual confirmation of these hints through its active perception of the reflection of truth in the laws of the visible universe. As Emerson says, again in "Nature," "All things are moral; and in their boundless changes have an unceasing reference to spiritual nature."⁴

(The innate faculty which allows the individual to penetrate, translate, and interpret material facts into spiritual laws is variously known, according to its use, as Imagination, Intuition, Revelation, or simply Reason. When employed by the poet, it is known as poetic imagination, for it enables him to communicate in even a higher manner the pleasure felt by the common spectator who glimpses beauty or spirit beneath the

⁴Ibid., p. 40.

surfaces and outlines of nature. The poet differs from the philosopher only in his objective, for both translate the laws of the visible universe into spiritual laws, which when viewed in their proper perspective provide a hint of truth, beauty, justice, and moral virtue, which are but different aspects of the One, the Over-Soul. Although the objective of the poet is beauty and the objective of the philosopher is truth, "The true philosopher and the true poet are one, and a beauty, which is truth, and a truth, which is beauty, is the aim of both."⁵ Elsewhere Emerson identifies this faculty as intuition, "The intuition of the moral sentiment is an insight of the perfection of the laws of the soul,"⁶ and as revelation, "We distinguish the announcements of the soul, its manifestations of its own nature, by the term Revelation."⁷

But always it is soul and the active perceptions of the soul that is meant by his variety of terms, for, as he says, "And so always the soul's scale is one, the scale of the senses and the understanding is another. Before the revelations of the soul, Time, Space and Nature shrink away."⁸

⁵Ibid., p. 55. *W. 2 2*

⁶"The Divinity School Address," Works, I, 122.

⁷"The Over-Soul," Works, II, 280-81.

⁸Ibid., p. 273.

Thus, from the variety of terms, we return to the unity of the soul. Soul is all, and the individual souls of men are but parts or reflections of the Over-Soul, or God. Physical man is but the temple of the soul, the organ through which the soul acts. When it acts through his intellect, it is genius; through his will, virtue; and through his affection, love. Once man realizes that he is the organ of the soul and that his soul is part of the Divine Wisdom which is within all things, then he will learn that there is nothing great that is impossible to the spirit of man. He will see that

...the soul in man is not an organ, but animates and exercises all the organs; is not a function, like the power of memory, of calculation, of comparison, but uses these as hands and feet; is not a faculty, but a light; is not the intellect or the will, but the master of the intellect and the will.... From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all.⁹

This light is the Divine Spirit, the presence of God in the visible universe. The profound unity of the individual soul with the Over-Soul is the reason for self-trust. For,

We first share the life by which things exist and afterwards see them as appearances in nature and forget that we have shared their cause.... We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receivers of its truth and organs

⁹ Ibid., p. 270.

of its activity. When we discern justice, when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams.¹⁰

Hence man cannot actively discover truth, for by injecting into his thought the human element, the Understanding, he raises a material barrier between himself and his object. He may well discover truths by an active application of the Understanding, and these truths when interpreted by Reason may provide a hint of eternal truth, but eternal truth itself comes only when the mind of man is clear of all preconceived and obstructing ideas. The process of receiving truth is a passive reception of the revelations of the divine inspiration within individual man.

Although all men are potentially equal in their ability to receive divine truth, the individual himself is often unable to distinguish whether the reports of others have been conceived in Reason or in Understanding; therefore, he can accept nothing second hand as being either authoritative or final. His portion of truth can be only what he himself perceives. Yet, since truth is eternal and immutable, and since his own faculty of intuitive perception is divine, he can confirm and verify the perceptions of others, oftentimes, by his intuitive recognition of their truth, thereby

¹⁰"Self-Reliance," Works, II, 64.

increasing his own experience and knowledge of truth. The divinity within him recognizes the divine quality of the perceptions of other individuals. Primarily, however, a man's personal portion of truth originates within himself and is perceived intuitively long before he meets it in the statements of other perceptive individuals. For this reason, Emerson says, a man should believe in himself, should rely upon the dictates of his inner guide, and should be aware that what is true for him in his private heart is universally true for all men.

Complete reliance on the higher self results in the economy and unity of action, for the law within will conform all to the law without. The Universal Law apparent throughout the visible world is identical with that law within man; therefore, by following the dictates of his divine inner guide, man will fulfill the law, that is, he will perform the will of God, and he will be in a proper relation with all nature. "The law is the basis of the human mind," says Emerson. "In us, it is inspiration; out there in nature we see its fatal strength. We call it the moral sentiment."¹¹

This union of man's individual action with the action of the universe brings him both peace and power,

¹¹"Worship," Works, VI, 221.

for he no longer swims against the fatal tide, wasting his strength and inevitably losing the contest, but, swimming with the current, he meets no resistance and has the entire force of Universal Law added to his own strength. He has aligned himself with the inevitable, and is, therefore, certain of success and power. By every ounce of strength that he wastes in opposition to the Divine Will, that which is to be, he suffers a corresponding loss of personal power. Within him is the guide to all action and the key to the secrets of the universe; he has but to listen in order to learn; to obey in order to command. In Emerson's words:

There is a principle which is the basis of things, which all speech aims to say, and all action to evolve, a simple, quiet, undescribed, undescribable presence, dwelling very peacefully in us, our rightful lord; we are not to do, but to let do; not to work, but to be worked upon; and to this homage there is a consent of all thoughtful and just men in all ages and conditions. To this sentiment belong vast and sudden enlargements of power.¹²

This apparent surrender of the individual will to a higher will is but man's refraining from hurting himself, for the predetermined end of all is the good of all. Once having perceived the essential unity of all things in the Divine Spirit and the predetermined good intended by the Beneficent Creator, then the

¹²Ibid., p. 213.

individual no longer opposes or resists the Divine Will, but, with perfect trust in the grand design and with complete reliance upon the direction of the soul within, he leads his life confident of his fulfilling the will of God and oblivious to the criticism of others. "The nameless Thought, the nameless Power, the super-personal Heart, - he shall repose alone on that."¹³ As a result, his every action shall be a prayer, and his whole attitude of voluntary obedience shall be a religion, for "Religion or worship is the attitude of those who see this unity, intimacy and sincerity; who see that against all appearances the nature of things works for truth and right forever."¹⁴ In terms reminiscent of Jonathan Edwards's "limited Free Will," Emerson explains individual man's relation to the universe and his Creator:

And so I think that the last lesson of life, the choral song which rises from all elements and all angels, is a voluntary obedience, a necessitated freedom. Man is made of the same atoms as the world is, he shares the same impressions, predispositions and destiny. When his mind is illuminated, when his heart is kind, he throws himself joyfully into the sublime order, and does, with knowledge, what the stones do by structure.¹⁵

¹³Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 219.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 240.

The consciousness of acting according to the Divine Will, as it is revealed to him by his intuition, gives the individual a sense of calm peace and the assurance of doing the right, regardless of the criticism of others or the number of obstacles met along the way. He feels that he is being guided by something greater than himself, and that he is being carried forward to an inevitable good. The animal instincts that formerly preoccupied his mind with thoughts of food, clothing, shelter, and self-preservation, are now absorbed into the higher instincts of Reason, and he learns that his only duty is to conform his actions to the dictates of his inner guide. Such conformity brings immense personal power, for:

All power is of one kind, a sharing of the nature of the world. The mind that is parallel with the laws of nature will be in the current of events and strong with their strength. One man is made of the same stuff of which events are made; is in sympathy with the course of things; can predict it. Whatever befalls, befalls him first; so that he is equal to whatever shall happen.¹⁶

Thus, a man must be true to himself, true to that divine idea which he represents and of which he is an agent, even though in the eyes of the world his thoughts and his actions may seem inconsistent, for once he attempts to compromise the divine principle within him

¹⁶"Power," Works, VI, 56.

in order to maintain a false consistency for the benefit of the world, he loses touch with the source and center of all being. He himself will see that the inconsistency is only apparent, that the apparently unrelated thoughts and contradictory actions are united and consistent in their tendency to converge toward the central divine truth. There will be an agreement in all his actions that are honest and natural in their hour, for, inspired by one will, all will be harmonious, however unlike they seem.¹⁷ Therefore, regardless of the criticism and the opposition of society, the self-reliant man must stand alone and be satisfied only with his consciousness of right and obedience to a higher nature. Such self-reliance partakes of the divine essence itself, for the complete reliance on and obedience to his real self, the Divine Spirit within, helps to make him self-sufficient, self-consistent, and self-existent, even as is the Over-Soul.

This is the ultimate fact which we so quickly reach on this, as on every topic, the resolution of all into the ever-blessed ONE. Self-existence is the attribute of the Supreme Cause, and it constitutes the measure of good by the degree in which it enters into all lower forms. All things real are so by so much virtue as they contain.... Power is, in nature, the essential measure of right. Nature suffers nothing to remain in her kingdoms which cannot help itself. The genesis and maturation of a planet, its poise and orbit, the bended tree recovering

¹⁷"Self-Reliance," Works, II, 58-59.

itself from the strong wind, the vital resources of every animal and vegetable, are demonstrations of the self-sufficing and therefore self-relying soul.¹⁸

(In studying the New Testament from the Unitarian and individual point of view, Emerson would have seen that as his own doctrine of self-reliance was a logical inference of his concept of the Over-Soul so too was the reliance of Jesus on God-within a natural corollary of his concept of the heavenly Father, the all-pervading, omnipresent Divine Spirit. Jesus had perceived that God is a spirit, that the spirit is within, and that this spirit of God makes its truth known to man. Thus, the divine soul or spirit within man is not only the "real" self, the "inner man," as Paul called it, but also, for the individual, the potential kingdom of God.¹⁸ By eliminating the desires of the flesh and the wants of the material man, the individual is enabled to lead the complete life of the spirit under the guidance of the "real" self, the soul, and as a result enter into the kingdom of God, the world of the spirit. Therefore, the reliance on self, the God within, in order for the individual to attain the complete moral life, is a natural corollary of both Emerson's and Jesus's concepts of the nature of the Divine Spirit.

The soul or higher self is often referred to by

¹⁸ *Works*, p. 30.
Ibid., pp. 70-71.

Jesus as "heart," the source of all man's natural and affectionate actions. It is to the heart that Jesus appeals in preaching his gospel. Man is not to be judged according to his appearances or superficial and hypocritical fulfillment of the laws, but according to their motivation or inspiration; that is, according to the heart. Thus, from the heart proceedeth all things. The heart does not think; it feels, and from these feelings come the acts of men. / As Jesus says:

O generation of vipers! how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things.¹⁹

Later, when rebuked by the Pharisees for allowing his followers to eat without washing, he replies in the same manner:

Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.... Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies....²⁰

The method of teaching used by Jesus was to urge his audience to examine themselves, to look inward, and

¹⁹Matthew 12:34-35.

²⁰Matthew 15:11, 17-19.

thus learn to rely more on the natural goodness of the human heart. This is the fundamental precept underlying the most famous and best statement of his doctrine, the Sermon on the Mount. It is in this sermon that he takes each commandment of Moses and re-defines it in terms of the feelings within from which conduct comes. As Moses gave them, the old laws were laws of restraint; the old laws as Jesus re-interprets them urge an active goodness springing from the internal desire to do good. The capacity to perform active good comes from utter reliance on the dictates of the inner guide, the heart and soul. Throughout his teaching Jesus constantly repeated the command: Obey the commandments. But in his interpretation of these commandments, he always so stated his parables that his hearers had to take each rule of conduct by its inward side, to understand that the motivation behind their actions determined whether the action was good or evil. Breaking one of the commandments was indeed evil, but the desire to break the commandments was equally evil, whether or not hypocrisy forbade its appearance in action. Thus, according to the new doctrine, repression and restraint of actions in order to keep within the law was not enough; a conversion of the human heart to an active desire for all good was necessary. No longer should

they ask and pray for a partial and personal good, but rather they should say with humble sincerity, "Thy will be done!" As opposed to the Old Testament doctrine and the interpretation of the Mosaic Law according to human Understanding, the doctrine of the New Testament concerns the interpretation of a higher law in the light of Divine Reason, which is innate in every human heart. As Emerson notes in his journal for 1833:

Jesus Christ was a minister of the pure Reason. The beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount are all utterances of the mind condemning the phenomenal world. "Blessed are the righteous poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men revile you," etc. The Understanding can make nothing of it. 'Tis all nonsense. The Reason affirms its absolute verity.²¹

Utter reliance on the dictates of the heart and continual communion with the God within bring peace, happiness, and assurance to the individual that he is performing the will of his heavenly Father. This assurance is the basis of the personal authority with which Jesus announced his doctrines. It was a source of amazement to his hearers that this apparently untrained countryman should preach with such authority, but it was the authority of one who has communed with God and has perceived truth. Having experienced the

²¹Journals, III, 236-37.

great influx of the divine inspiration as a result of total abnegation of fleshly desires, Jesus led the spiritual life so completely that he had lost his own identity in the vastness of the Divine Spirit; he was but the mouth through which the voice of the Spirit within uttered its eternal truths. Hence his authority was not personal, but spiritual; it was not the pompous authority of the elevated man, but the authority which is inseparable from all Divine Truth. Having achieved through discipline the total subjugation of the physical self to the spiritual self, and the capacity for frequent illumination and communion with God, he had dedicated himself to the active preaching of the Way to Eternal Life and to the announcing of those divine truths revealed to him. The Way was self-renunciation, the denial of the flesh, and by its practice he had communed with God and had experienced the inexpressible joy which that union inspires in the communicant; thus, he himself was visible evidence of the proof of his doctrines. Consequently, immersed in the spiritual life and considering himself only the agent of his heavenly Father who had revealed these divine truths to him, the man and his message became one. He did not hesitate to identify himself with his message and to say to his followers:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of

life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.²²

But the meaning is even clearer when in other instances he says:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.²³

It is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.²⁴

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.²⁵

It would seem that the man Jesus was so completely at one with his message that the individual had ceased to exist. He never identified himself as Jesus of Nazareth, but always only as one of the human race, the Son of Man, or as one of the spiritual sons of God, the Son of God. His every word was a sermon, every story a parable, and every act a moral lesson. He lived, taught, and was his message. Such seems to be the view of Jesus held by Emerson, when he says:

Jesus Christ . . . said, in this jubilee of sublime emotion, "I am divine. Through me,

²²John 6:47-50.

²³John 8:51.

²⁴John 6:63.

²⁵John 14:10.

God acts; through me, speaks. Would you see God, see me; or see thee, when thou also thinkest as I now think.²⁶⁾

To those who had not yet achieved communion with God and perception of all truth, Jesus recommended faith, as a higher source of understanding and as trust in God. Attainment of the state of being at one with God would automatically bring insight into the eternal truths, but until then earnest seekers of the good should live by faith, an implicit trust in God as the omnipotent Divine Spirit and source of all being. This trust in and reliance on God as the Father of all frees the individual of worldly cares. On a higher level, faith brings divine inspiration and insight into the ways of God. As such it is far different from the worldly understanding of material things; it is both aspiration for and partial perception of essential truth. Paul approaches Emerson's own conception of Reason in his description of this higher understanding:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.... Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.²⁷

Again, Paul affirms that the evidence of faith is

²⁶"The Divinity School Address," Works, I, 128-29.

²⁷Hebrews 11:1-3.

supported by the manifestation of God within and is confirmed by laws of the physical world:

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.²⁸

Faith is the first sign of the real conversion of the human heart to an active desire to attain the good and the true. It is a sign that the soul has overcome the body and believes in itself. As an attribute of the soul, faith has no racial restrictions, but is common to all men and dwells in all human hearts.

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing, one another....²⁹

Consequently, those seekers after the good who live by faith and according to the spirit shall eventually commune with God, or as Jesus says:

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall

²⁸Romans 1:17-20.

²⁹Romans 2:14-15.

see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.³⁰

Paul, in his exegesis of the teachings of Jesus, contrasts the worldly life with the life of the spirit in terms which clearly anticipate Emerson's distinction between Understanding and Reason. For Paul the "carnal mind" is that animal instinct which cares for the wants of the flesh, and which is subject to the laws of the material world. As such it corresponds to the Understanding. On the other hand, that higher instinct, faith, which corresponds to Reason, is that which cares only for the soul and the spiritual life. It is an attribute of the soul, which is God in us.

For they that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace: Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.... But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.... For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.... The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ....³¹

In the journal of 1833 Emerson comments:

Various terms are employed to indicate the counteraction of the Reason and the Under-

³⁰Matthew 5:8-9.

³¹Romans 8:5-7, 9, 14, 16-17.

standing, with more or less precision, according to the cultivation of the speaker. A clear perception of it is the key to all theology, and a theory of human life. St. Paul marks the distinction by the terms natural man and spiritual man. When Novalis says, "It is the instinct of the understanding to counteract the Reason," he only translates into a scientific formula the sentence of St. Paul "The Carnal mind is enmity against God."³²

Faith without practice of the Way, however, is not enough. Faith is that positive quality of the soul which serves first as a propellant, to start the individual off on the straight and narrow Way to eternal life, and later as a sustaining influence and source of strength to encourage, to reward, and to protect him from the temptations of the worldly life. The Way as practiced and preached by Jesus was the renunciation of the physical self. To Jesus self-denial or self-renunciation meant the exclusion of all fleshly desires and their consequent dictation of actions. The true way to the kingdom of heaven was to live the whole and complete life of the spirit according to the promptings of the divine inner guide, the Father in us. Although the term self-renunciation is negative in its connotation, the Way itself is a positive and conscious assertion of the soul over the body. The epitome of all the teachings of Jesus lies in the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus advances

³²Journals, III, 237.

his positive doctrines. Rather than saying, Thou shalt not be proud, arrogant, rich, and disdainful, he says, Blessed are ye who are poor in spirit, meek, merciful, and persecuted. He warns that the Mosaic Law still holds, but that virtue does not consist of the non-breaking of laws; rather it lies in the active practice of the opposite of that which the law forbids. It is not enough not to be evil; one must be actively good. Thus, not only must one not kill; he must help sustain life through love and charity. And adulterous lust must be replaced by brotherly love and affection.

The Way, then, consists of the active following of the dictates of the heart in opposition to those of the loins, of the soul rather than of the body. Although according to the Old Law one is entitled to justice in repayment for an injury, it is a restriction of the soul to be continually seeking to balance the account; therefore, one should love, forgive, and do more than is first required in order to rise above the evils of the world and to free the soul from its earthly chains. The goal toward which the Way leads is the perfection of all the divine qualities which are the natural attributes of the soul. To achieve this perfection requires the elimination of all the material dross with which the body encumbers the soul. Thus, to the extent of one's ability, he must seek to

emulate the Father of All himself.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you: That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.³³

Above all the novice must declare himself wholeheartedly for the spiritual life, for no man can serve two masters. Once this declaration is made and accepted, his overwhelming love of God leaves no room for earthly fears, worries, or vexations. With complete reliance on God, the individual takes no thought for life, food, clothing, or physical well-being, but concentrates on seeking the kingdom of God, in faith and trust that he shall be provided for by the Father. Thus the essence of the Way is the complete renunciation of the physical self, the leading of the spiritual life according to the dictates of the soul or the Father within, and absolute reliance on and trust in God.

Essentially, Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance agrees with the teachings of Jesus as presented and

³³Matthew 5:44-48.

interpreted by his early disciples in the New Testament. Reliance on self, in Emerson's philosophy, is reliance on the real self, that is, Reason, Intuition, or Soul, which is the presence of the Over-Soul, or God, within. The essence of this self-reliance is complete freedom and independence of action on the part of the individual in his pursuit of the moral life. To be true to himself he must be not only unhampered by the restricting conventions of society but also independent of his physical self. The mind and the soul must be completely free of importunate fleshly desires and material wants in order to be properly prepared for the influx of the divine spirit. Thus, renunciation of the physical self is an integral part of the doctrine of self-reliance. The individual must renounce all that is personal and selfish. He has but to listen to the directions of the divinity within him in order to know the will of God. He has but to obey these revelations and communications in order to achieve peace and power. By perfect obedience to the will of God and by renunciation of all that is personal, he shall align himself with the forces of the universe, shall share the Divine Secret, and shall experience perfect peace.

The forces are infinite.... But if you wish to avail yourself of their might, and in like manner if you wish the force of the intellect and the force of the will, you must take their divine direction, not they yours. Obedience alone gives the right to command.... So this

child of the dust throws himself by obedience into the circuit of the heavenly wisdom and shares the secret of God.³⁴

A study of Emerson's early sermons reveals that essentially his concept of Self-Reliance then was no different from that later advanced in his published works. The idea that true self-reliance is reliance upon a higher self, the God within, is the same, but in the sermons he makes almost exclusive use of biblical texts to support his conclusions; whereas in his later essays practically all references to the Bible have been omitted to make way for confirmative quotations and paraphrases from other sources. Once this fact is clearly seen, it would seem only logical to assume that the primary source of Emerson's concept of Self-Reliance must have been the teachings of Jesus as presented in the New Testament.

In the very first sermon that he preached as an active minister, "Pray Without Ceasing," in 1826, Emerson clearly defines his belief in the God within. He denotes conscience as "God's viceregent enthroned within," and echoing Jesus's emphasis on the heart as the source of all action, he exclaims, "The heart, the heart is pure or impure, and out of it, are the issues of life and of DEATH."³⁵

³⁴"Perpetual Forces," Works, X, 83-84.

³⁵McGiffert, Young Emerson Speaks, p. 12.

In a sermon on "Self-Culture," in 1830, Emerson again interprets the doctrines of Jesus in terms of self-reliance, or reliance on the soul within. He says:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ...withdraws man from looking for his motives to the world, outward, and directs him to look within.... It is in the power of man, so far as, obeying this voice, he puts aside the force of vulgar motives, and refusing the service of his senses, subjects himself to the law of his mind...to obtain a degree of participation...in the attributes of God....³⁶

Later in the same year, he expands the theme of dependence on God-within in the sermon "Trust Yourself," which contains all the essential ingredients of the later essay "Self-Reliance." He advances as one of the chief effects of Christianity the enhancement of the individual's self-respect, and, as in the previous sermon, he claims that Jesus's doctrine of the presence of God within the soul justifies self-trust. Essentially, the theme of the sermon is no different from that of many of his later essays, for self-trust is not justified on the humanist level as a trust in one's own physical and mental powers but rather as a trust in a higher self, a trust in the divinity within. In everything except name, it is the doctrine of the Over-Soul. First, he makes the point that a man must accept

³⁶Ibid., p. 100.

himself for what he is and as God has created him, believing that he is unique and that as a being created by God he has within him all the elements necessary for his physical, intellectual, and moral existence.

If God has made us with such intention as revelation discloses, then it must be that there are in each of us all the elements of moral and intellectual excellence, that is to say, if you act out yourself, you will attain and exhibit a perfect character.... I wish to enforce the doctrine that a man should trust himself; should have a perfect confidence that there is no defect or inferiority in his nature; that when he discovers in himself different powers, or opinions, or manners, from others whom he loves and respects, he should not think himself in that degree inferior, but only different; and that for every defect there is some compensation provided in his system; and that wherever there is manifest imperfection in his character, it springs from his own neglect to cultivate some part of his mind.... I am afraid of the great evil done to so sacred a property as a man's own soul by an imitation arising out of an unthinking admiration of others. I believe God gave to every man the germ of a peculiar character. The ends of action are the same, but the means and the manner are infinitely various.³⁷

A few lines further, Emerson continues:

In like manner, men fail in neglecting the intimations of their own inborn intelligence out of an unlimited deference to other characters. Let them on the contrary have greater confidence in the plan yet to them unknown which the moral Architect has traced for them.... When I look at the vegetable world, I admire a tree, a flower, and see

³⁷Ibid., p. 106.

that each oak and each lily is perfect in its kind though different in its proportions and number and arrangement of branches and leaves from every other oak and lily in the field. And shall I not believe as much of every mind; that it has its own beauty and character and was never meant to resemble any other one and that God pronounced it good after its own kind.³⁸

With reliance on this higher self comes power, and with loss of trust and reliance comes loss of power, for when the individual no longer follows the law within him but attempts to follow the law of another, he has wandered off the path intended for him; he wastes his strength overcoming obstacles which were never intended to obstruct him. When the individual follows the law within, however, the way is smooth and easy, for he has been given a specific force, a capacity, or an ability to overcome any and all obstacles that lie in his way. Lying potentially within every individual is the capacity to attain perfection; he has but to trust in the dictates of the soul and to employ the forces allotted him. In a passage strikingly similar to many employed in the later essay, Emerson writes:

Let him scorn to imitate any being. Let him scorn to be a secondary man. Let him fully trust his own share of God's goodness, that if used to the uttermost, it will lead him on to a perfection which has no type yet in the universe, save only in the Divine Mind. One measure of a man's character is his effect upon his fellowmen. And any one who will steadily observe his own experience will I think become convinced, that every false word

³⁸Ibid., pp. 107-08.

he has uttered, that is to say, every departure from his own convictions, out of deference to others has been a sacrifice of a certain amount of his power over other men. ... Now what is it to speak from one's own conviction, to trust yourself, - what is it but to keep one's mind ever awake, to use the senses and the reason, to rely on your birthright of powers which God bestowed?³⁹

Individuals who trust in and follow the direction of the divine spirit within them become agents by which the will of God is made known and performed. By consulting the oracle within, man perceives divine truth, and through his expression of it, he may assume all the power and authority properly belonging to such divine wisdom.

For when men converse on their pressing affairs they do not so much seem to speak as to become mere organs through which facts themselves speak. Now that is precisely the way in which God seems to justify those who withdraw their eyes from everything else, and fix them on their own thought only. They become, as it were passive, and are merely the voice of things. If a man would always as exclusively consult his own thoughts as men do in these things, he would always speak with the same force, a force which would be felt to be far greater than belonged to him or to any mortal, but was proper to immortal truth.⁴⁰

As he continues, Emerson indicates clearly that the self in which we must trust is by no means the physical self. The physical self is not to be trusted, for it is ever seeking through its infinite wants and

³⁹Ibid., p. 108.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 109.

petty desires to enslave the soul. Therefore, since it is not oneself, properly speaking, in which one must trust, but rather a higher self, then the doctrine of self-trust and self-reliance is not centered around the ego and is not "selfish." Rather, through the realization that God is in every man, the soul perceives that the proper use of the physical self is to serve both God and man. In so doing one performs the will of God here on earth and justifies his existence. In such a self-reliance, says Emerson, there is nothing inconsistent with a spirit of dependence and piety toward God, for:

In listening more intently to our own soul we are not becoming in the ordinary sense more selfish, but are departing farther from what is low and falling back upon truth and upon God. For the whole value of the soul depends on the fact that it contains a divine principle, that it is a house of God, and the voice of the eternal inhabitant may always be heard within it.⁴¹

As a result of his greatly increased independence, the individual becomes even more dependent on God and on God's representative within him. This independence of society and conventionality, however, is not anti-social, in spite of its possible appearance, for it in no way relieves one of his duties toward others. Yet, the individual must insist on his right to perform this duty according to his own conviction and not that

⁴¹Ibid., p. 110.

of another. Indicating that the direct source of his concept of Self-Reliance is the New Testament, Emerson continues:

It is important to observe that this self-reliance which grows out of the Scripture doctrine of the value of the soul is not inconsistent either with our duties to our fellow men or to God.... Certainly it is our duty to prefer another's good always to our own, and gratefully to borrow all the light of his understanding as far as it agrees with ours, but the duty is quite as plain the moment our own convictions of duty contradict another's, we ought to forsake his leading, let him be of what wisdom or condition he will, and without fear to follow our own.⁴²

In another sermon of that year, "How Old Art Thou?," Emerson reiterates the same thought:

...God has manifested that we must make this choice for ourselves. It is the stern call of his moral order that each must be wise for himself.... The knowledge that has been accumulated by others is of no use until it has been verified by us. For all the learning and sound judgment and rich experience that has been in the world no man is wiser by one poor thought who is not wise in himself.... None can by any means redeem his brother, all past wisdom is nothing but as far as it is identified in our own. Our own is nothing till our will directs it. But God is continually presenting excitements, suggestions to startle us into attention and beseech men as Christ besought them to be reconciled to God.⁴³

Although he must maintain his independence, the self-reliant man, in his obedience to the law of God

⁴² Ibid., p. 109.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 118.

as revealed to him from within, will seek to advance the good throughout the universe in accordance with God's will. Thus, he will love and serve God first of all by loving and serving his fellow men, who are likewise the children of God. His independence and self-reliance will not serve to advance self-interest but to promote the interests of all men. The truths revealed to him are to be communicated, and the power or authority which accompanies this influx of divine wisdom is to be used in the service of humanity. This is the theme of one of Emerson's sermons delivered in the winter of 1831, "Self and Others," and it will be recognized to be identical with that of Jesus's commandments, to love one's neighbors and to serve one's fellow men, as well as with that of many of Emerson's later essays in which he urges action as the right end of thinking. He says in this sermon:

It might be shown that he who withholds his aid from his fellow man is more a loser than his fellow man from whom he withholds it; that the soul of man was made to act for others as much as his body was made to breathe the air; that speech and reason and knowledge and grace and beauty and power are all worthless whilst they are confined to one, and were given to be communicated; that all his improvement is from a selfish to a social life - a development of power to act with and for others.⁴⁴

And a few lines further, he adds: "The love of

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 130.

God is the principle on which the love of our neighbor stands. The reason why I must help him when I can, is because he is God's child, as I am.... God is my Father.... His will is the good of the Universe, and that I must promote, and my neighbor's as a part of it."⁴⁵

In the following year, 1832, Emerson returns to what is by now one of his favorite themes in the sermon "The Genuine Man." He repeats much of what he has said before, speaking of the inner man, the soul, and the necessity for self-consistency without regard to social conformity, and the rewards of those who give themselves up to a complete reliance on the God within. Describing the distinction between the higher and the lower self, he explains:

There are two ways of speaking of self; one, when we speak of a man's low and partial self, as when he is said to be selfish; and the other when we speak of the whole self, that which comprehends a man's whole being, of that self of which Jesus said, What can a man give in exchange for his soul? And in that sense, when you say of a man that he thinks too much of himself, I say, No, the fault is that he does not think of himself at all. He has not got so far as to know himself. He thinks of his dress, he thinks of his money, he thinks of his comely person, and pleasant voice, he thinks of the pretty things he has got to say or do, but the eternal reason which shines within him, the immortal life that dwells at the bottom of his heart he knows not.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 131.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 182-83.

This higher self, then, is the real self, the eternal Reason which dwells in the heart of the individual. It is soul and stands opposed to the material wants and desires of the lower self, the body. To lead the good life, says Emerson, we must follow the dictates of this inner guide.

It seems to me, brethren, as if we wanted nothing so much as a habit of steadily fixing the eye upon this higher self, the habit of distinguishing between our circumstances and ourselves; the practice of rigorous scrutiny into our own daily life to learn how much there is of our own action and how much is not genuine but imitated or mercenary; the advantage of arriving at a precise notion of a genuine man such as all good and great persons have aimed to be, such as Jesus designed to be and to make many become, such in short, as in the language of the Scripture, is "the New Man, created after God in righteousness and true holiness."⁴⁷

This as we shall see is the secret of all true greatness, the development of the inward nature, the raising it to its true place, to absolute sovereignty, hearkening to this voice which to most men sounds so faint and insignificant above the thunder of the laws and the customs of mankind. And it is founded and can only be founded in religion. It can only prefer this self because it esteems it to speak the voice of God.⁴⁸

Thus, Emerson continues, the genuine man, by obeying and living according to his higher self, becomes a moral agent of the Supreme Power; he is self-consistent because he lives from the center outward;

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 183.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 184.

his every word and his every act come from a source greater than himself. He is an organ through which the will of God makes itself known and felt. Emerson acclaims this higher self the genuine man, for, "It is the essence of truth of character that a man should follow his own thought.... The genuine man is always consistent for he has but one leader. He acts always in character because he acts always from his character. He is accustomed to pay implicit respect to the dictates of his own reason and to obey them without asking why."⁴⁹

In this manner, the genuine man aligns himself with the universe and, in proportion to the degree of his reliance on the divine inner guide, gains a corresponding amount of additional strength and power. As long as he is true to the universal law revealed to him, he has the weight of the universe behind his every action. In words that anticipate the very diction and style of his later essay on the Over-Soul, Emerson says:

It was happily said of a great man "that he was content to stand by, and let reason argue for him." That is precisely the impression left on your mind whenever you talk with a truth speaker, that it is not he who speaks, so much as reason that speaks through him. You are not dealing with a mere man but with something higher and better than any man - with the voice of Reason, common to him and you and all men. It is as if you conversed with Truth and Justice.

This man has the generosity of spirit to give

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 184-85.

himself up to the guidance of God and lean upon the laws of nature; he parts with his individuality, leaves all thought of private stake, personal feeling, and in compensation he has in some sort the strength of the whole, as each limb of the human system is able to draw to its aid the whole weight of the body. His heart beats pulse for pulse with the heart of the Universe.

To some this may seem a vague expression. There is this supreme universal reason in your mind which is not yours or mine or any man's, but is the Spirit of God in us all. The more it is trusted, the more it proves itself trustworthy.⁵⁰

Finally, in a summarizing paragraph that seems to contain the essential elements of all Emerson's "transcendental" philosophy, he says:

I would add one remark, that the conviction must be produced in our minds that this truth of character is identical with a religious life; that they are one and the same thing; that this voice of your own mind is the voice of God; that the reason why you are bound to reverence it, is because it is the direct revelation of your Maker's Will, not written in books many ages since nor attested by distant miracles but in the flesh and blood, in the faculties and emotions of your constitution; that Jesus Christ came into the world for this express purpose to teach men to prefer the soul to the body. Until this conviction is wrought and acted on a man can never be said to have fairly set out on his journey of improvement, for this alone can teach him how to blend his religion with his daily labor so that every act shall be done with the full consent of his head and his heart and he shall not regard his business as so much interruption or so much injury to his religious life, and leave his faith at home, when he goes to his store. The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath and Religion is made for man's

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 186.

benefit not for God's.⁵¹

As a result of this comparative study, it may be seen that Emerson's concept of Self-Reliance remained substantially the same throughout his life. There is little essential difference between the Self-Reliance preached in the early sermons, as adapted from the New Testament, and the more fully developed concept advanced in the later essays. Since this seems to be true, the question of the origin or source of the idea would seem to be equally obvious. The sermons were written and preached over a period of ten years, from 1826 to 1836, and since Emerson's real interest in both Neoplatonism and Orientalism did not fully develop until the 1840's, it would seem logical to assume that the majority of ideas and philosophical concepts contained in the sermons must have come from his reading and personal interpretation of the New Testament.) It is true that his first acquaintance with De Gérando's Histoire Comparée des Systèmes de Philosophie was made in 1830, but little or no influence of either Neoplatonism or Orientalism on his own thinking is noticeable in the journals until his acquisition of Thomas Taylor's translations of Plato and the Neoplatonists in 1842 or 1843.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 188-89.

The one influence, other than that of the New Testament, which may be evident in some of the sermons is that of Coleridge, whom he read and studied intensively in the late 1830's, and from whom he undoubtedly adopted the distinction in terms of Reason and Understanding. Yet, the preponderance of biblical references which Emerson uses to support his textual themes, and the constant application of the teachings of Jesus to his own philosophical concepts, to the exclusion of almost all other references, would seem to indicate that the New Testament was truly the primary source from which he adapted and developed the ideas which made up the basic structure of his whole philosophy.

IV

COMPENSATION

(Perhaps one of the most familiar Emersonian concepts, next to the doctrine of the Over-Soul, is his statement of the law of Compensation. In effect these two concepts are one and the same, for if the Over-Soul is the sustaining spirit of the universe, the law of Equity, Balance, and Compensation is the evidence of the presence of this invisible spirit or Divine Intellect in all things. The causal spirit may not be seen, but its effects may be duly noted, and they will be seen to fall into a logical and consistent sequential pattern identified by Emerson as the law of Compensation. It is the one law of all life in the universe, for the universe and all things in it are in perfect balance one against the other. Such is the evidence that the senses and the Understanding present. It remains for the higher faculty of Reason to perceive the essential unity of all things, to see that this law, although evident in all individual units, is really but one and the same law which prevails throughout the entire universe. The Over-Soul is the sustaining spirit of all creation; the law is the effect and the evidence of this support,

perceivable to the Understanding in the form of "scientific" laws of cause and effect, action and reaction.

Although Compensation was always a favorite topic with Emerson and in one form or another is to be found in any one of his essays or lectures, the specific essay of that name probably contains his fullest and most explicit statement of the basic law. Of all his philosophical doctrines, this was without doubt his earliest and most original, in the sense of having been early verified by his own observation and experience. He informs us in the opening sentences of this essay that from boyhood he had wished to write on Compensation, for it had seemed to him that on this subject life and the common sense of the people were far ahead of the theologians.) Recognizing it as a divine law and as a trustworthy guide to mankind, he adds:

It seemed to me also that in it might be shown man a ray of divinity, the present action of the soul of this world, clean from all vestige of tradition.... It appeared moreover that if this doctrine could be stated in terms with any resemblance to those bright intuitions in which this truth is sometimes revealed to us, it would be a star in many dark hours and crooked passages in our journey, that would not suffer us to lose our way.¹

¹Works, II, 93-94.

(It is Emerson's opinion that once the law of Compensation is fully understood by the individual, he will have a firmer grasp on life itself and the assurance that a solid principle of justice prevails in the universe, for man's suffering as a rule stems from his ignorance of the consequences of his own actions. He will learn the fundamental truth that he can cheat no one but himself, but even more important he will realize that he cannot be cheated except by himself. The most important consolation of all, however, which results from an understanding of the workings of this law is the realization of its duration.) It "was always and always must be, because it is now." It is permanent, unchanging, and works for the most part in the here and now. In effect it is the very justice that man continually laments the lack of and fails to see in the world. To understand it, however, involves his consideration of the question of values. Actions are not necessarily rewarded in kind, and success, virtue, and goodness are not to be evaluated according to the market index. Thus, having justified his announcement of this law by his practical purpose, Emerson proceeds to treat Compensation in its grander aspects and to illustrate its appearance in all things throughout the world.

On the more material level the law of Compensation

is known as the laws of polarity, of opposites, or as duality. The fact of duality is obvious to the Understanding, and it finds repeated expression in the proverbs of all nations. Such sayings as "All things are double, one against another; tit for tat; an eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth; blood for blood; measure for measure; love for love,"² are common expressions in all languages.

On a slightly higher level, however, Compensation is apparent as the law of polarity, of action and reaction, and is often expressed in scientific and mathematical laws conceived by the Understanding. In every part of nature, says Emerson, we meet with evidence of this law of opposites or polarity. All things have their opposites or other halves, as light and darkness, heat and cold, male and female. "An inevitable dualism bisects nature, so that each thing is a half, and suggests another thing to make it whole; as, spirit, matter; man, woman; odd, even; subjective, objective; in, out; upper, under; motion, rest; yea, nay."³

Not only is this dualism evident in the world, but it is also evident in all its parts, generally

²Ibid., p. 109.

³Ibid., p. 97.

according to large sections of the world, specifically in regard to individual plants, animals, and men, and intrinsically in the laws of cities and nations. In each individual of every animal tribe, there is something that resembles the ebb and flow of the sea, day and night, man and woman. None are favorites, for a certain compensation balances every gift and every defect.⁴ Again, in geographical areas this dualism is evident in the influences of climate and soil on political history, for, in spite of physical hardships suffered by the inhabitants, a cold climate invigorates, and a barren soil breeds neither fevers, crocodiles, nor poisonous insects.⁵ Likewise, the same dualism underlies the very nature and condition of individual man, for every faculty which is a receiver of pleasure has an equal penalty put on its abuse, every grain of wit has as partner a grain of folly, and everything gained has caused the loss of something else. "The waves of the sea do not more speedily seek a level from their loftiest tossing than the varieties of condition tend to equalize themselves."⁶ The same law applies to groupings of such individuals in cities and nations, for things

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., pp. 97-98.

⁶Ibid., p. 98.

have a way of adjusting themselves in spite of the apparent evils and abuses in civil governments of any kind. Tyranny inspires rebellion, cruel and bloody laws reduce the number of convictions, high taxes weaken the economy of the nation and soon produce nothing. On the other hand, in the too-liberal democracy the individual citizen is stimulated to resist the pressure of the mob; when laws are too mild private vengeance asserts itself; and citizens willingly and voluntarily contribute to the support of a government which performs a service to them.⁷ Thus is dualism apparent in all parts of the world, in all creatures, and in all men.

Such is the law as seen and comprehended by the Understanding. All things seem to be double, tit for tat. In reality, however, they are not doubles but halves; one cannot exist without the other. The higher faculty of Reason perceives this essential unity, that, as the whole reappears in all its parts, so the part is related to and is representative of the whole. The essence of the All is God or the Soul, and as Emerson states, paraphrasing the Scriptures:

All things are moral. That soul which within us is a sentiment, outside of us is a law.... "It is in the world, and the world was made by it." Justice is not postponed. A perfect

⁷Ibid., p. 100.

equity adjusts its balance in all parts of life.... Every secret is told, every crime is punished, every virtue rewarded, every wrong redressed, in silence and certainty. What we call retribution is the universal necessity by which the whole appears wherever a part appears.⁸

(Since all is of God, then all is moral, and since the whole appears in the part, then what is true for the whole is likewise true for the part.) Therefore, everything is complete in itself as an individual unit because the All which reappears in it is complete in itself. There cannot be a half without its accompanying half; no good without its proportionate evil; no cause without its effect; and no action without its reaction. Although these "pairs" are referred to as "halves," in reality there is no severance, no division, no duality; the separation noted by the Understanding is only apparent and is caused by the limitations of human perceptions and the false illusions of time and space. All is of here and now. The cause and the effect are one, are here and now, but the effect seems to be spaced out over the years because it is only gradually revealed to the growing awareness of the individual. The effect is coincident with the cause, for they are inseparably one and the same. The Reason, an attribute of the soul, perceives the one-ness of all things and

⁸Ibid., p. 102.

the relationship of these things to the One.

Every act rewards itself, or in other words integrates itself, in a twofold manner; first in the thing, or in real nature; and secondly in the circumstance, or in apparent nature. Men call the circumstance the retribution. The causal retribution is in the thing and is seen by the understanding; it is inseparable from the thing, but is often spread over a long time and so does not become distinct until after many years. The specific stripes may follow late after the offence, but they follow because they accompany it. Crime and punishment grow out of one stem. Punishment is a fruit that unsuspected ripens within the flower of the pleasure which concealed it. Cause and effect, means and ends, seed and fruit, cannot be severed; for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end pre-exists in the means, the fruit in the seed.⁹

Although no act can be separated from its effect, good or bad, most of the miseries of mankind arise from the attempt to do just that. Man's fault lies in trying to separate his selfish and sensual pleasures from their costs. Such penalties as are attached to overindulgence in sensual pleasures, however, are personal and relatively unimportant. In a far deeper sense, man's real suffering arises from his own selfish actions; by seeking to have power over things for his own ends and personal satisfactions, the individual takes on the universe as his opponent and is overwhelmed in the process, for the balance which has been destroyed is inevitably set right, and his selfish

⁹Ibid., pp. 102-03.

actions return to hurt only himself. Every act, says Emerson, rewards itself, either as retribution or as compensation, for the act and its consequence are one. By way of further illustration of this truth, Emerson adds: "A man cannot speak but he judges himself. With his will or against his will he draws his portrait to the eye of his companions by every word. Every opinion reacts on him who utters it.... You cannot do wrong without suffering wrong."¹⁰

Every right action, however, incurs a benefit, according to the same law. As man's sufferings arise from his own selfish actions, so his blessings flow from his unselfish actions. Every action aimed at the benefit of the whole, or the rest of mankind, sets off reverberations which return to concentrate its blessings on the head of the one who acted. As a stone thrown into a pool causes wavelets to circle outward to a distance proportionate to the disturbance, after which the initial state of equilibrium is gradually but inevitably restored by their concentrating back to the point of action, so universal harmony can be restored only by the eventual re-converging of the consequences of every act upon the one who acts. The good deed returns to bless the doer. "Love, and you

¹⁰Ibid., p. 110.

shall be loved," says Emerson. "All love is mathematically just, as much as the two sides of an algebraic equation."¹¹

The law thus works both ways, and it is evident in all things. The observer of the workings of this law may arrive at one of three conclusions. First, as did the ancient Greeks, he may see in it the basis of a practical philosophy of life, a working philosophy of the practice of moderation in all things. Or, perhaps, he may conclude that since all things have two sides, a good and a bad, then all circumstances and the results of all actions are indifferent, for they will inevitably balance with no concern of his. But the inspired observer, the one who makes use of Reason rather than Understanding alone, will perceive that this doctrine of indifferency is apparent only, that in reality Unity is the higher law, and that since all things are moral, the life and soul of which is God, then the law is positive rather than indifferent. This point is emphasized by Emerson when, having observed that the doctrine of Compensation is not the doctrine of indifferency, he continues:

There is a deeper fact in the soul than compensation, to wit, its own nature. The soul is not a compensation, but a life. The soul is. Under all this running sea of cir-

¹¹Ibid., p. 116.

cumstance, whose waters ebb and flow with perfect balance, lies the aboriginal abyss of real Being. Essence, or God, is not a relation or a part, but the whole. Being is the vast affirmative, excluding negation, self-balanced, and swallowing up all relations, parts and times within itself. Nature, truth, virtue, are the influx from thence. Vice is the absence or departure of the same.... It cannot work any good; it cannot work any harm. It is harm inasmuch as it is worse not to be than to be.¹²

(The soul, therefore, is a fact above the law of Compensation. It is affirmative, and virtue is the positive action of the soul. By its very nature, the soul is unselfish in that it works for itself, for the good of the All.) Thus every action inspired by the soul is positive and contains within it a plus quality, benefiting the whole rather than the individual. Every action inspired by the selfish desires of the body is negative and benefits only the individual to the exclusion and harm of the whole. Since virtue is the proper attribute of the soul, and vice is merely the absence of this quality, then the presence or absence of soul in the act determines whether it is virtuous or vicious. In Emerson's words, the soul is; it is the highest fact, and in the world of reality it is not subject to the law known as Compensation, for it is the One. Consequently, the attributes of the soul present to the individual are likewise not

¹²Ibid., pp. 120-21.

subject to the law. Love, beauty, wisdom, justice, and truth are not bought by any loss; there is no penalty or price tag attached to any attribute properly belonging to the soul.

(Not only is the soul positive and affirmative, but its actions are accumulative.) One step taken by the individual toward possession of a proper attribute of the soul makes the next step easier. A virtuous action generates additional power for the successful accomplishment of future actions. "In general," says Emerson, "every evil to which we do not succumb is a benefactor."¹³ Likewise, every evil to which we do succumb weakens and betrays the soul within. Thus, the natural law of the soul is progressive growth and amelioration, for "the sure years reveal the deep remedial force that underlies all facts,"¹⁴ and the human soul perceives in fable, history, law, proverbs, and conversation, "A plain confession of the in-working of the All and of its moral aim."¹⁵

In summary, then, the law of Compensation, revealed in the natural world as polarity, duality, action and reaction, is the evidence of the invisible

¹³Ibid., p. 118.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 126.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 106.

support and presence of God in the visible universe. The Understanding sees only the effect of a higher cause and calls it a physical law. The Reason sees beyond the effect to perceive the cause itself, God or the Over-Soul. Since all is of the essence of God and is sustained by God in the form of soul, then the moral aim of soul is the good of the All. When the individual performs a selfish act, seeking only a private good and disregarding the good of the whole, he is inspired by the lower self and consequently suffers a loss of the moral sentiment which is an attribute of the soul. The loss of virtue is immediate, and the penalty attached to the selfish action is the misery incurred by the sense of this loss. On the other hand, an unselfish action by the individual benefits the whole, and there is an immediate increase in his portion of virtue and moral sentiment. Although in the material world the law is tit for tat, every good having its bad and every bad its good, in the world of reality or the soul the law does not apply, for the soul is positive, self-existent, and in-working. The individual may aspire to the possession of any attribute of the soul, such as virtue, love, justice, and beauty, without having any penalty attached. In addition to his enjoying this easy access to the proper qualities of the soul, the individual's positive efforts

toward the attainment of these attributes are accumulative, each successful effort bringing an increase in power for the next effort, for the soul grows and increases in power with its every addition of soul-like qualities.

(That Emerson's doctrine of Compensation is an integral part of his over-all philosophy may clearly be seen in the fact that once this law is perceived and understood by the individual it leads him inevitably to practice complete self-reliance, for, since all acts are rewarded according to their nature, he is assured that justice prevails in the world, and as a result of this basic confidence in the justness and rightness of things, he is also assured of success if he will but follow the dictates of the soul within him.) He can accept no interpretations of the right from others, for he himself must rely only on the revelations from within. Consequently, he will be completely independent of all churches, creeds, rituals, and orthodox practices or conventional doctrines, for his worship of God will not consist of the punctual performance of ritualistic ceremonies or the repetition of formalized prayers but will be the daily performance of the will of God. There will be no difficulty in determining God's will, since the individual will adopt as a guide for action

what he has perceived to be the moral aim of the soul, the greatest good of the greatest number. His reward is perfect peace and equanimity, for, conscious of God's good will toward him, he realizes also the justice of any penalty he may receive for wrong-doing. Reason, or his higher understanding, enables him to perceive the cause underlying the effect, and he knows that the present effect is the logical and inevitable result of the original act. He may even feel joy in the fact that through the freedom of his will he can consciously improve himself and his character by eliminating all self-centered thought and action by loving God with all his soul and his neighbor as himself.

Since the doctrine of Compensation is undoubtedly the earliest of Emerson's philosophical beliefs, one which was soon verified by his own observation and experience, there would seem to be no possibility that it was greatly influenced by his later reading in the Platonists, Neoplatonists, or Oriental scriptures, even though he borrowed liberally from these sources to provide textual support of his ideas in the essays and lectures. It would seem logical, however, to assume that the idea of Compensation should have come from the book with which he was most familiar during his early years, the Bible, or more specifically, the New Testament. For example, having included a brief

statement of the principle of Compensation in his journal of 1823 at the age of nineteen, in 1826 he develops this principle into a fullfledged philosophical concept which contains essentially all the elements later embodied in the essay of that name. Although many of the journal passages were later incorporated in the essay on Compensation, there is one noteworthy change that took place in the transposition; many of the unidentified aphoristic phrases used in the essay are shown in the journal to have come directly from the Bible. In the opening lines of the journal entry, for instance, he identifies the source of a phrase familiar to the most casual reader of the essay: "All things are double one against another, said Solomon. The whole of what we know is a system of compensations."¹⁶

The study of the New Testament, the journals, and the early sermons of Emerson, has convinced the writer beyond any doubt that Emerson found the doctrine of Compensation in the New Testament, that he thought it an important element in and fundamental to the whole teachings of Jesus, and that much of what Emerson later said and wrote on the subject he had said earlier in sermons addressed to a more or less orthodox congregation and framed in a biblical context. Although

¹⁶Journals, II, 72.

the doctrine of Compensation is not specifically preached by Jesus as a belief essential to one's salvation, he often mentions it as an established fact and universal law. Even when it is not explicitly stated, it underlies and supports the truth of his teachings. Knowing Emerson's manner of reading for "lustres," for truths and facts, one can hardly believe that he failed to notice and to make use of these evidences of the law of Compensation in a book he knew so well. The fact would have reappeared with his every repetition of the Lord's Prayer: forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And in reading the prayer in the New Testament he would have found Jesus's own explanation to his disciples:

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.¹⁷

Jesus, like Emerson, realized that all actions are rewarded, and warned his followers not to be satisfied with a material recompense. In fact, a good argument could be advanced that the Way leading into the kingdom of heaven is based essentially on the inevitability of Justice and Compensation as a

¹⁷Matthew 6:14-15.

universal fact. In a confessed oversimplification of Jesus's doctrines, could it not be claimed that basically they rely on the established fact that all actions, good or bad, are rewarded in kind, and that, therefore, the way to win entry to the kingdom of heaven is through the elimination of all evil and the performance of all good in the absolute faith that the accumulated reward must be proportionately great? As Emerson has phrased it, the object is to "Put God in your debt."¹⁸

In the advice to his disciples which follows the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasizes the necessity of performing all good actions in secret lest they be rewarded materially by the admiration, praise, or respect of their fellow men. He warns:

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.... But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly.... But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father, which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.... Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.¹⁹

¹⁸"Compensation," Works, II, 119.

¹⁹Matthew 6:1, 3, 4, 6, 16.

Such warnings, however, are more or less incidental to his teaching of a way of life and pertain more to the personal actions of the individual in everyday life than to his leading of the spiritual life. Yet the fact of Compensation is evident even in Jesus's announcement of a higher social code of human relationships, for in telling his followers to be generous and forgiving in their opinions of their fellow men, he warns:

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.²⁰

Or as Luke records the warning, keeping the spirit but changing the words:

Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you.... For with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.²¹

Not only must one perform his good deeds in secret and be generous in his judgment of mankind, he must also tilt the balance in his favor by always doing more than is required of him. He will thus conquer all selfish personal desires and will have no thought for himself but will act from the center

²⁰Matthew 7:1-2.

²¹Luke 6:37-38.

outward, always thinking of and doing for others. In doing this he will rise above the realm of Understanding and the law of Compensation into the world of reality. He will perceive the one-ness of all things, and like the Father in heaven, who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, he will love and do good to all mankind. Having risen above the law of Compensation to the law of Unity, he will find his reward in the act itself and in the increased goodness and power within himself. The apparent evils of the world will not affect him, for he has a complete disregard of his lower or physical self, and the apparent joys of the material world will not be missed, for the essence of all earthly joys is contained in its purest state and many times over in the presence of virtue itself. The aim of the individual, according to Jesus's teachings, should be to be as perfect and as unified in every act and thought as is the Father in heaven. As Jesus says, referring to the old law of Compensation and the higher aim of the individual:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke, also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.... Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy: But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate

you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you: That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.... Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.²²

Luke reports these sayings in a less lyrical fashion but perhaps more clearly by showing the necessity of the individual's rising above the ordinary give and take of daily life which makes up the law of Compensation in the material world. Likewise, he shows the antithetic qualities of this law by illustrating both sides of the scale, for he says:

Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.... But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.... But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful, and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.²³

Although the way of life preached by Jesus may quite properly be identified as self-renunciation, in actuality the essential doctrine of all his teachings is the positive nature of good, of virtue, and of the kingdom of heaven. The affirmative manner in which he teaches his doctrines is a standing

²²Matthew 5:38-41, 44-45, 48.

²³Luke 6:21, 24-25, 35-36.

contrast to the negative "Thou shalt nots" of the Old Testament. (Self-denial, then, becomes primarily the increasing absorption of the individual with the whole rather than the continued centering of his thoughts only on himself.) Thus, when one perceives the Eternal One and the universal laws which sustain the world, these higher thoughts leave no room for the petty, insignificant desires and cares of the physical self. Self-renunciation, therefore, is not so much the conscious renouncing of anything as it is the making room for the further expansion and development of the soul-like qualities within, often identified by Jesus as the Father-within or as the kingdom of heaven. Truth, when heard and understood, or seen and perceived, by the individual, expands the soul. Jesus always describes the Word, the Kingdom, and the Way in positive terms, usually comparing them metaphorically to the smallest of things which have nevertheless the greatest value or growing power. For example, in several parables he compares the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed:

Which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.²⁴

²⁴Matthew 13:32.

Likewise he compares the kingdom of heaven to leaven, "which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."²⁵ Furthermore, he adds:

...the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.²⁶

In a like manner Jesus emphasizes the positive quality of good throughout his teaching, for as he informs his followers at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, once the heart has been converted to a desire for goodness and virtue, then:

Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.²⁷

On another occasion when he explains to his disciples the difference between those who understand his parables concerning the kingdom of heaven and those who do not understand and continue to place their trust in the things of the material world, he says:

Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath,

²⁵Matthew 13:33.

²⁶Matthew 13:44-46.

²⁷Matthew 7:7-8.

to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.²⁸

Thus virtue is above the law of Compensation, for those who lead the spiritual life and place their trust in God and the soul shall progressively increase their knowledge and amount of virtue; whereas those who place their trust in the things of material life fall under the law of Compensation and shall progressively decrease in virtue. The difference between those who have virtue and those who have it not is essentially the same as the difference between virtue and vice. As Emerson has interpreted it, not only is virtue positive and gained without a compensatory cost, but vice is negative and is merely the absence of virtue.

Usually, however, it is only to his disciples that Jesus emphasizes such a distinction. In the majority of his parables he speaks of common things in terms of common understanding. To make his points clear and easy for his audience to understand, he often makes use of the law of Compensation as an illustration, for the law is a part of folk wisdom, of common sense, and is in the realm of Understanding. Thus he teaches that all the commandments against such

²⁸Matthew 13:11-12.

sins as covetousness, murder, and theft can be summed up in the positive commandment, "Love thy neighbor," for an active love of others would certainly negate all such sins. The active good that one does would consequently influence all the relations of man with man and would inevitably return upon the individual. Again, he says:

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.²⁹

These are but hints for the leading of a better way of life, spiritual yet practical in that the sins of man against man would be eliminated and all men would benefit from the active practice of the golden rule. This teaching, however, is but a corollary of the real message and serves primarily as a necessary preparation for the leading of the complete life of the spirit. The real message concerns the renunciation of worldly desires, the denial of the physical self, and the reward or compensation of spiritual peace, joy, and communion with God, which the practice of self-renunciation brings. Implied throughout his teaching is the fact that the law of Compensation is inevitable, that what a man wants he may get if he but pay the price. Riches may be gained by diligence

²⁹Matthew 7:12.

and sharp trading; renown and reputation by public prayer and fasting; power by suppressing and intimidating one's fellow men; but the price must be paid, and the rich man with his love of money will with difficulty enter the kingdom of heaven; the Pharisee will be called a hypocrite; and the powerful will be hated as well as feared. In spite of the great price paid for these things, none of them will endure or give eternal satisfaction and joy, and never will they bring peace. Therefore, the wise man, rather than lay up treasures which cannot endure for long on this earth, will store up future rewards for himself in heaven and will enjoy the additional power and peace here on earth that the practice of the spiritual life of self-denial gives as compensation. By avoiding in this world the material rewards for virtuous actions, which, according to the law, must inevitably be recompensed, then one must necessarily be requited with spiritual blessings in both this world and the next. Therein is the reward great, for virtue is positive and above the law; it is rewarded in this life with great inner peace and joy, and with eternal blessings in the kingdom of heaven.

In the journal of 1831 Emerson returns to his favorite theme, the perfection of the law of Compensation, and his conclusions are a summary of the

message of Jesus:

...exactly proportionate is the merit of the self-denial and the power it confers.... By that sacrifice of body to soul, of the apparent to the real, have you not given body and fact to a sentiment, which, if it is not recognized on 'Change, is sterling with God and his creation? Have you not been filled, spiritualized, exalted by a delicate, rare magnanimity which constitutes you a nobleman in the kingdom of heaven? Have you not given firmness to your brow, an unquestionable majesty to your eye when you meet other eyes, a serenity to your solitude, - yea, just so much of assured presence of God to your soul?... The adoption in act of a great sentiment gives you assurance on the faith of Him that liveth that you have made exactly that progress that you seem to have made; but my riches add nothing to me.³⁰

Paul, in his propagation of the gospel, repeats and emphasizes even more the law of Compensation implicit in the teachings of Jesus, citing the Old Testament in support of the law. In explaining to his Roman converts the duties of a Christian, he shows the fact of Compensation as a law of justice and a reason for men not to seek to avenge their injuries:

Recompense to no man evil for evil.... Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves; but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.³¹

³⁰Journals, II, 390-91.

³¹Romans 12:17, 19-21.

Again, in writing to the Corinthians, he makes use of the law of Compensation to illustrate his points, saying:

Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.³²

And when he urges them to make up a collection for the saints in Jerusalem, he reminds them:

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.³³

Once again in the epistle to the Galatians he makes use of the same image in his summary of Jesus's message in terms of the inevitability of the law of Compensation:

Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.³⁴

Thus, the essential doctrine of the Way seems to be closely linked with if not actually based on the law known as Compensation.

Attention has already been called to the fact that Emerson early perceived and formulated a theory

³²I. Corinthians 3:8.

³³II. Corinthians 9:6.

³⁴Galatians 6:7-8.

of Compensation. As he informs the reader in the opening lines of his essay on the subject, he had wished to write a discourse on Compensation since boyhood, a statement which is evidently true, for at the age of nineteen he includes in his journal for 1823 a statement of the principle of Compensation as a law obvious in the workings of nature and the material world and clearly perceived by the common sense. He claims the perception of the principle of Compensation to be the essential element of folk wisdom, preserved through the ages in the proverbs of all nations. Three years later, in 1826, he develops the concept further, in terms of both common sense and higher reasoning, but now, perhaps as a result of his ministerial studies, the principle is perceived to be more than just an element of folk wisdom, evident in the world of nature; it is a moral law which in theological terms he identifies as Retribution and Providence. Claiming that everything we know is but a system of Compensation, that every defect is compensated for, every suffering rewarded, every sacrifice made up, and every debt paid, he writes, in obvious preparation for a sermon:

The history of retributions is a strange and awful story; it will confirm the faith that wavers, and, more than any other moral feature, is perhaps susceptible of examination and analysis, and, more than any other, fit to

establish the doctrine of Divine Providence.³⁵

A few lines further he speaks of those who have sold themselves for personal gain and success:

They have paid the price and by the laws of Providence they shall receive their purchase. But by the laws of Providence they shall receive nothing more. They have...asked no more of the Intellectual Principle than how to cast their drivelling balances of loss and gain.³⁶

In such a manner does the law work in the material world, and as for those who sell themselves so cheaply, "Ignorance shall curse them with a leaden cloud on their understandings, their hours shall drag by in stupid darkness, unvisited by Thought, the daughter of God...."³⁷ But the law also works on a higher plane, for the compensations ordained by God are not confined to a single class of moral agents but play their part in the adjustment of the uneven balance of condition and character. It is common knowledge that fearful crimes bring fearful remorse, that love of money is punished by the care of money, that honest poverty is cheerful, that riot produces disease. Therefore, says Emerson, in applying this doctrine to the individual's efforts to earn his character in

³⁵Journals, II, 72.

³⁶Ibid., p. 73.

³⁷Ibid.

the sight of God, "I say that sin is ignorance, that the thief steals from himself; that he who practices fraud is himself the dupe of the fraud he practices, that whose borrows runs in his own debt; and whose gives to another benefits himself to the same amount."³⁸

Man has, he continues, two duties in this world, toward himself and toward society, and whether or not he has fulfilled the second duty can only be determined by his conscience, "the man within the breast." He adds: "It is not the true estimate of a man's actual value that is made from the balance of figures that stands in his favour on his ledger. This is to be corrected from the book of Life within him."³⁹ And with the oratorical flourish of a newly installed minister, he concludes: "We have, we trust, made it apparent, that in the aspect of self, our doctrine that nothing in the intercourse of men can be given, is sound. The doctrine is no less true, no less important in its respect to our social nature."⁴⁰

Perhaps the most important points to be noticed in this entry are those which are easily recognizable as permanent fixtures in Emerson's theory of Compensation.

³⁸Ibid., p. 75.

³⁹Ibid., p. 76.

⁴⁰Ibid.

For example, Compensation is identified with Providence as a law of God which holds true both in this world and the next. Furthermore, he claims that sin is ignorance, of a negative quality, implying, as he makes clearer in later writings, that virtue is positive and is the attribute of Reason, or Thought, "the daughter of God." But the main point of his argument is that the law of Compensation is consistent and works without fail throughout the universe, there being a personal gain for every unselfish act, a loss for every selfish one.

(In the first sermon that Emerson preached to his new congregation, in the same year, 1826, he makes use of Compensation as a principal support of his theme, "Pray Without Ceasing." Since every secret wish is a prayer, he says, then all men do pray without ceasing. Likewise, it is of the nature of Providence that every individual has within himself the capacities and capabilities of mind and body to accomplish any and all things that he earnestly desires.) And he adds, "Unceasing endeavors always attend true prayers, and, by the law of the universe, unceasing endeavors do not fail of their end."⁴¹ Thus it behooves the individual to desire only virtue and to perform only

⁴¹McGiffert, Young Emerson Speaks, p. 7.

virtuous actions, for all prayers are answered, and they bring with them their inevitable compensations according to the law of Providence. Because of the inevitability of this law, he says, the prayers of the individual, "in a certain sense, are like the will of the Supreme Being."⁴²

Although virtue and vice reap their respective rewards on a lower level in this world, he continues, the true compensation comes in the after-world. If the individual can rid himself of vice and selfishness in this world and cultivate high thought and noble virtue, then he will, by having lived the spiritual life here, cross over the barrier into the eternal life of the spirit with no difficulty, for "It is plain that as we die in this world, we shall be born into that. It is plain, that, it is, if it be anything, a world of spirit; that body, and the pleasures and pains appertaining to body can have no exercise, no mansion there; that it can be the appropriate home only of high thought and noble virtue."⁴³ And a few lines further, he adds:

Of this mysterious eternity, about to open upon us, of the nature of its employments and our relation to it, we know little.

⁴²Ibid., p. 6.

⁴³Ibid., p. 10.

But of one thing be certain, that if the analogies of time can teach aught of eternity, if the moral laws taking place in this world, have relation to those of the next, and even the forecasting sagacity of the pagan philosopher taught him that the Laws below were sisters of the Laws above - then the riches of the future are dealt out on a system of compensations.⁴⁴

Of this law of Compensation, active both here and hereafter, Emerson has more to say in his sermon "On Showing Piety at Home" in the following year, 1827. Speaking of the positive nature of goodness and virtue, he says:

...not an hour of the longest life but may be signalised by a virtuous action, by some sacrifice though small and unknown to another's wish or of our own inclination to our duty; and as it is the consequence of all goodness to increase the power of him that has it, that one of us, my brethren, by a rigid study of himself may every hour become a richer and mightier moral agent.... One well spent hour is the proper seed of heaven and eternity.⁴⁵

Urging his congregation to practice piety at home, even though it may seem to go unseen, he assures them that Compensation will inevitably be effective, both now and later. "Let us try your capacity to be ruler over many things by your faithfulness over a few things...then, fear not but God in the boundless future shall more than recompense your honest steward-

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 17.

ship. Fear not but in the earth also, your reward shall be reaped."⁴⁶

In the sermons written in the year 1830 he repeatedly returns to the theme of Compensation, regardless of his immediate topic, or to some aspect of the doctrine. For instance, in several of the sermons he is obviously intrigued by the positive nature of virtue and goodness and their compensatory attributes, as has been noticed in his "On Showing Piety at Home." In a sermon entitled "The Individual and the State," in which he advances ideas concerning the relationship of the two, later used in his essay on Politics, he soon digresses on his favorite topic: "Nothing in this world ends in itself. High virtue will surely be attended with deep respect. It is of God and cannot be overlooked.... Virtue tends to create virtue as surely as vice to beget vice."⁴⁷

Again, in the sermon on "The Authority of Jesus," of the same year, he restates this aspect of virtue's growth and compensation: "It is God's mark upon every moral act that it tends to produce good; upon every immoral act that it tends to produce harm."⁴⁸

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 18.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 80-81.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 93.

A noticeable advancement in his conception of the idea is evident in his sermon on "Self-Culture," also of that year, when it is compared to the earlier statement of the idea in "On Showing Piety at Home." In the previous sermon it is apparent that, although he feels that the law of Compensation has some effect in this world, he bases his conclusions on the orthodox belief that true recompense for virtue can take place only in the after-life. In the present sermon, however, it is obvious that he has advanced to a position identical to that taken in the later essay on Compensation, that the law is a law of God, that all laws of God are eternal, and that therefore the law of Compensation must be of effect in the Now, since it cannot be affected by the false illusions of time and space. Putting emphasis on the eternality of the law, he writes:

Let it be considered by us that there is a retribution in every hour for past action and therefore no time must be lost. Already our good and our evil actions are gone before into judgment, and their rewards are visited on our heads. We interpret the Scriptures when they speak of judgment as always referring to God's award upon character after this life, and so are apt to forget that the laws of God are eternal, and, as they have no end, so they have no beginning. Whenever there is moral action, these laws take place. Wherever there is character, there is judgment. It will be admitted by all who have thought much upon life, that, in a great degree a compensation takes place in our condition for all the qualities of the man. Go where you will, you

shall work out with great fidelity your own effect.... Such is the force of spiritual nature that every thing takes the hue of our thought.... Everything speaks wisdom to the wise, and sensuality to the sensual, and worldly hope to the ambitious, folly to the frivolous, and God to the good. As a man thinketh so he is and so he receives.⁴⁹

A year later, in 1831, he identifies Compensation as the "moral law." In the sermon "Miracles," the law of balance and equity is announced to be the law which presides over the world and which also reigns in the hearts of all men. Essentially he proclaims the one-ness of the Deity, the law as it is witnessed in the universe, and the moral law within men. It is not difficult to see in his use of these terms the foreshadowing of the Over-Soul, Reason, and the Intuition. He begins his argument against the probability of miracles by declaring that the fact of the individual's being is the greatest wonder of all, that it is an even more astounding fact than could be the resurrection of a man from the tomb. All life is a miracle in the sense that it cannot be understood by man, but the greatest of all facts is that:

Our constitution is moral, and so is the constitution of the universe. All things preach the moral law, that is to say, a life in conformity with nature is a moral life. Health is to be sought by temperance. Safety is got by abstaining to offend. The

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 101-02.

love of others is gained by loving them. All benevolent feelings are pleasant to him that exercises them. All malevolent feelings are painful. And the moral law with no essential variation reigns in the bosom of every man. The character of the Deity that presides over the world is thus ascertained to be moral.⁵⁰

Again, in the journal of that year he applies his more advanced conception of Compensation to the subject of prayer and its efficacy for the individual. Anticipating several important philosophical ideas soon to be developed further in Nature, he writes:

In connexion with the great doctrines of Compensation or Reaction, we get the best insight into the theory of prayer. It teaches that prayer does not at all consist in words, but wholly is a state of mind. Consider it also in connexion with the doctrine that God is in the soul of man, and we shall make another step towards truth. For it is not to be expected that God should gratify any man in an unreasonable request, only because he asks it violently, but precisely in proportion as a man comes into conformity with God, he asks right things, or things which God wills, and which therefore are done. And when he is wholly godly, or the unfolding God within him has subdued all to himself, then he asks what God wills and nothing else, and all his prayers are granted. In this sense the promises of Christ to his disciples may be understood.⁵¹

In the 1834 sermon "The Miracle of Our Being," he again returns to Compensation as one of the laws of the universe perceived by the mind of man. Re-

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 122-23.

⁵¹ Journals, II, 431-32.

affirming the eternality of the law and the affirmative nature of virtue, he presents the essence of his whole theory of Compensation and includes in the summary many allied philosophical concepts, easily recognizable as the basic elements of his later philosophy.

There is nothing in material nature...so splendid and perfect as the law of compensations - the law according to which an act done by any moral being draws after it its inevitable fruit which no chance and no art can elude. The nature of these laws, their extent, their omnipotence he can learn only by acting, and observing how they determine and reward every action. The Creation is so magically woven that nothing can do him any mischief but himself. An invisible immortal fence surrounds his being which defends him from all harm he wills to resist; the whole creation cannot bend him whilst he stands upright; but, on the other hand, every act of his, is instantaneously judged and rewarded: the lightning loiters by the speed of retribution; every generous effort of his is compensated by the instant enlargement of his soul.... To open to ourselves - to open to others these laws - is it not worth living for? - to make the soul, aforetime the servant of the senses, acquainted with the secret of its own power; to teach man that by self-renouncement a heaven of which he had no conception, begins at once in his heart; - by the high act of yielding his will, that little individual heart becomes dilated as with the presence and inhabitation of the Spirit of God.... Thus the moment Reason assumes its empire over a man, he finds that he has nothing low and injurious in him but it is, under this dominion, the root of power and beauty. His animal nature is ennobled by serving the soul: that which was debasing him will now prove the sinews of his character....⁵²

⁵² McGiffert, pp. 209-10.

In this summarizing passage may be found the essential philosophical concepts developed later in Nature and other essays, for, first, the fact of Compensation and its inevitability demonstrates the intrinsic unity of cause and effect, of the act and its consequence, and this unity is an attribute of the Eternal One. Emerson later gives to this concept of the Deity the name Over-Soul. Next, the fact that no good or evil can come to the individual except by his own act, which is instantaneously judged and rewarded, teaches Self-Reliance. Moreover, once the individual perceives and comprehends the law as it is evident in this world, he realizes that Compensation actually leads into a higher law, and that through renunciation of self and the yielding of his will to the Over-Soul, Unity, or God, he may enter the realm of Reason and the soul and rise above the restrictions of the law of Compensation as it applies in the material world of the Understanding. Inherent in this concept of Reason and soul is the idea of the affirmative and positive nature of virtue and its contribution to the growth and increase of the soul. It is evident, therefore, that Emerson at this time held the opinion not only that virtue is an attribute of the soul, and that the individual through self-denial can rise above the limitations of the physical world into the sphere

of the soul, but also that the law which is apparent in both worlds is one and the same. To the Reason it is obviously Unity, but to the clouded Understanding it appears to be Polarity, Duality, or Compensation.

(It has been seen that the basic elements of Emerson's theory of Compensation are present in the teachings of Jesus and his followers as Emerson read them in the New Testament. The fact of Compensation is an essential element of the doctrine of the Way itself, and its inevitability is its main argument for acceptance. Not only is mention often made of the distinction between the spiritual and the physical world, but the positive quality of virtue and goodness in the growth of the soul is cited as an added inducement for the conversion of the individual and his entering on the Way leading to the kingdom of heaven.) Therefore, since it is evident from various passages in Emerson's early journals, and from his statements in the sermons, that he held his theory of Compensation well before his thinking was greatly influenced by his reading of the Platonists, the Neoplatonists, or the Oriental scriptures, it would seem that the most logical source of his conception of Compensation is the New Testament, which not only contains the essential elements of the idea as Emerson advanced it but which is also the book with which he was most

familiar from early childhood.

The immediate effect of Emerson's thoughtful considerations concerning the working of the law of Compensation in man, in the world, and in the universe, was an increased conviction of the primary importance of the individual, who is the possessor of a divine soul and who must work out his personal salvation according to his own self-reliant and independent thought and action. As an integral and fundamental ingredient of his total philosophy, Emerson's concept of the individual is, in its own right, worthy of separate treatment and consideration as an inherited Christian belief, verified by his own thought and experience.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

(The concept of the importance of the individual, inherent in the Christian tradition, is instantly recognized as one of the basic tenets of Protestant-Puritan theology, which was inherited by and received special emphasis in orthodox Unitarianism. It is not surprising, then, to find that a young Unitarian minister had also given it special emphasis in his own philosophical thinking. Yet, in Emerson's case, the idea is more than an inherited belief, for he accepted nothing from orthodoxy that he himself could not confirm. It is evident that in his questioning investigation of orthodox beliefs he returned to the New Testament time and time again to interpret anew the message preached by Jesus, perceiving and confirming by intuition and intellect the truths intended by Jesus to be the essential elements of his doctrine. As a result of his investigation, Emerson arrived at a clearer conception of the nature of the Father in heaven preached by Jesus. Freed from the orthodox trappings, the Father was perceived to be, in the words of Jesus, pure Spirit residing in the hearts of all men. Long before he discovered the name, Emerson had

described the Father in terms of the Over-Soul as being present within all men. Confirming and accepting also the doctrine of Self-Reliance, or reliance on the God within, he adopted logically and naturally the Christian concept of the importance of the individual as another basic element in his expanding philosophy. Thus, although the idea was one that Emerson had long been familiar with in his early youth and ministerial studies, the concept owed its inclusion in his philosophy to his own act of perception and confirmation of its truth in his investigation of the fundamental Christian doctrines.)

In a larger sense the concept of the importance of the individual is a natural, logical, and inevitable consequence of his primary belief in God as being an omnipresent Spirit, in effect, the Over-Soul. All elements in Emerson's philosophy are likewise the natural and inevitable results of this primary concept, for if God is present in the hearts of all men, then man has no logical choice but to rely upon the dictates of his own conscience in his determination of good and evil or upon his own intuition and intellect for the revelation of truth. If man has the key to all truth within himself, there is no justification for his accepting the hearsay evidence of other men as being truth for him. More-

over, if God so loves the world that he chooses to reside in the hearts of men, then of what inestimable worth is each individual, who serves as a temple for the living God. Again, individual man is but a tiny part of the whole; yet, in the spherical symbol which Emerson uses to denote the whole, or Over-Soul, each man in turn is more than just a part; he is the center of the universe and all things are for his benefit. He is a part, but he is an integral part absolutely necessary for the fulfillment and the continuation of the divine plan.

(It is this conception of the individual that Emerson maintains throughout his written works. The great men of the past and present are those who rely upon themselves, upon their innate abilities, and who obey the inspired dictates of their own souls./ They refuse to conform to society when society is wrong; they act as "one with authority" and like Jesus they "listen at home." Obedient to the law within, they rest assured in the eventual justification of their every act. Whether they be scholar, poet, philosopher, or political leader, their success and greatness depend upon the degree of their reliance on and obedience to the law within.

It seems evident that during Emerson's skeptical period of questioning investigation of the orthodox

tenets of the Christian faith it would not have taken much to cause him to disregard Jesus as only an idealistic myth or a much over-rated prophet, as have so many other skeptics, but the individual strength and complete self-reliance of Jesus made a tremendous impression on him. Far from the orthodox picture of a meek and effeminate Jesus preaching non-resistance and voluntary poverty, the man Jesus who emerged from Emerson's studies was an authoritative, self-assured man of God who believed in himself and in his message so completely that he voluntarily suffered himself to be crucified in order to prove to his followers the truth of his doctrine. There are few if any essays or lectures by Emerson in which he does not cite Jesus at least once as the perfect example of the strong individual who relies on himself and is a law unto himself. During his long and depressing days of skeptical investigation and intermittent physical recuperation in Florida, the attraction of the personality of Jesus may well have been the anchor of Emerson's faith. Whether this be true or not, Emerson soon regained his faltering faith and failing health to return and become a minister of orthodox Unitarianism, but it is evident from even a hasty survey of his early sermons that his intent was to preach the real message of Jesus rather than

the orthodox, traditional interpretations of his doctrines.

In the final published essays, Emerson often mentions the man Jesus as one who perceived truth but whose message has been misunderstood and misrepresented throughout the ages. The best known and perhaps most typical reference occurs in "The Divinity School Address," in which Emerson portrays Jesus as the truth-perceptive man, the one man in all history who was utterly true to the law within him and all men. In a passage often quoted, Emerson declares:

Alone in all history he estimated the greatness of man.... He felt respect for Moses and the prophets, but no unfit tenderness at postponing their initial revelations to the hour and the man that now is; to the eternal revelation in the heart. Thus was he a true man. Having seen that the law in us is commanding, he would not suffer it to be commanded.¹

Again, in the essay on "The Over-Soul," Emerson makes a distinction between the voices of those who seek truth and those who have truth, or those who speak from without and those who speak from within. Those who speak from without speak only from their acquaintance with truth as reported by others. Those who speak from within speak from experience as possessors

¹Works, I, 128-30.

of the fact. And to illustrate his point, Emerson remarks, "Jesus speaks always from within, and in a degree that transcends all others."² In much the same manner does Emerson show that every truly great man has been one who relied on himself and the dictates of his own soul, but he also makes it clear that every individual has the potentiality to become equally great provided he does likewise. In "The American Scholar," for example, he identifies this ability to speak from within as an attribute of the active soul:

The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although in almost all men obstructed and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates. In this action it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man.³

Having shown in Nature that the material universe is intended for the education of what he later designated as Man Thinking, in his later essays, he proceeds to classify the component parts of Man Thinking as scholar, poet, philosopher, and politician, showing in every instance that the "greatness" and individual success of each was due to the degree of insight and

²Works, II, 287.

³Works, I, 90.

reliance upon the law within which each possessed and practiced respectively. Speaking of "The American Scholar," he says: "For the instinct is sure, that prompts him to tell his brother what he thinks. He then learns that in going down into the secrets of his own mind he has descended into the secrets of all minds."⁴

(Thus it is that individual man is the micro-cosmic center of the universe. Within himself is the key to all truth, and only within himself can he find truth, justice, beauty, and personal good. "He who knows that power is inborn, that he is weak because he has looked for good out of him and elsewhere, and, so perceiving, throws himself unhesitatingly on his thought, instantly rights himself, stands in the erect position, commands his limbs, works miracles...."⁵ In brief, it is only within himself that man can find God.)

In two thousand years of theological wrangling, the doctrines of Jesus which first attracted the attention and interest of his listeners have been pretty nearly forgotten except by children of Sunday School age. To his listeners who were hearing some-

⁴Ibid., p. 103.

⁵"Self-Reliance," Works, II, 89.

thing for the first time, Jesus preached a God of Love, a heavenly Father who cared for his children and to whom the welfare of each individual was of importance. Jehovah was God, but he had been misrepresented. His benefits were freely given and were not bought by the sacrifices of rich men. One needed only to be the dutiful son in order to experience the love of the Father, not only in the future but here and now. This was the essential doctrine which appealed to the original audience of Jesus and caused them to want to know more about the exact nature of their duties to God. All the sermons and impromptu discussions by Jesus throughout his ministry consisted primarily of the annunciation of the God of Love and an explanation of the duties of men. He explained that the foremost duty of the individual son of the heavenly Father, even though he is absolutely assured of his Father's beneficence, is to recognize and submit to his authority. Such filial obedience may best be shown by a complete trust and faith in God and an attempt to imitate his goodness. God the Father displays his parental goodness to us through his concern for all men, who are likewise sons of God; therefore, by loving and serving his fellow men the individual may best love and serve God the Father.

Such is the essence of his message as given in the Sermon on the Mount, but in addition he announces certain auxiliary truths to act as incentives for the entering upon the Way. First, disobedience brings inevitable retribution, but obedience and submission bring inexpressible joy and peace. Such joy, inexpressible as it is, is climaxed by direct communion with God and the complete realization of the presence of God and the kingdom within. Next, and most important, the individual has the power to achieve this state of grace for himself through his own efforts with God's helping hand. One has but to take the first step and each succeeding step will be the easier. The individual must realize that he is a son of God and that he is important to and loved by his Father; he must therefore assume his inherent nobility and act accordingly as a dutiful son.

This theme of the inherent nobility of the individual and of his importance to the heavenly Father runs throughout the sermons but is especially emphasized in the Sermon on the Mount. Within this sermon Jesus appeals directly to the individual, not to the crowd, and urges him to recognize his own worth. For example, immediately after listing in the beatitudes the divine qualities found in individual man, he exclaims:

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.⁶

Again, urging the individual to trust in God the Father for all things, he adds:

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?⁷

And a few lines further, repeating his description of God as the heavenly Father, he advances the central doctrine of his message:

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.⁸

In closing, stressing the fact that he is appealing to the individual in the group, he concludes:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock....⁹

⁶Matthew 5:13-16.

⁷Matthew 6:26.

⁸Matthew 7:11-12.

⁹Matthew 7:24.

On other occasions Jesus often repeats his doctrine of the individual's importance. At one time when criticized by the Pharisees for allowing his followers to pluck corn on the sabbath day, he replies to their rebukes by citing biblical precedent and giving as the moral of the story that:

The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath. Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.¹⁰

(Although one is often tempted to wonder why the translators felt that every occurrence of the phrase "son of man" in the singular referred only to Jesus, when it is often used in the plural to refer to all men, the real significance of the remark lies in his designation of himself as the Son of man rather than as the Son of God, if indeed he is referring to himself in this instance. The point of his argument is once again the importance of the individual. It is not a reserved privilege of the Messiah to break the law that justifies this act, but rather it is justified because the well-being of men is far more important than the strict observance of the law.)

Again, approached by a man with a withered hand, he is asked by the Pharisees whether it be lawful to heal on the sabbath. His reply contains virtually

¹⁰Mark 2:27-28.

the same doctrine:

What man shall there be among you that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.¹¹

On still another occasion, when accused by the Pharisees of fraternizing with publicans and sinners, he preaches an entire sermon on the theme of the importance of the individual to the Father of All. Using once more the image of the lost sheep, he begins:

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.... I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?... Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.¹²

And he concludes the impromptu sermon with the parable of the prodigal son.

Thus, in brief, it may be seen that Jesus addresses his message to the individual, not to the crowd; that

¹¹Matthew 12:11-12.

¹²Luke 15:4-5, 7-8, 10.

it is one of his primary beliefs that the individual soul is important to God the Father; and that the welfare of the individual is more important than the strict observance of the law, for law was made for man, not man for law.

Although orthodoxy has shown a tendency to interpret all or most of Jesus's remarks concerning the individual's importance as referring only to himself, his divinity, and personal possession of the Godhead, it is not illogical to assume that Emerson, brought up a Unitarian, would interpret such comments by Jesus as referring to his status as an individual possessor of a divine soul, as a Son of man rather than as the only begotten Son of God. Such an interpretation seems also to be supported by the writings of Emerson's favorite New Testament expounder of the Christian message, the legal-minded Paul, who refers to Jesus in his epistle to the Romans as "made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness...."¹³ Paul repeatedly reminds his parishioners that they too are individually the temples of the living God:

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God,

¹³Romans 1:3-4.

and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?¹⁴ Consequently, he writes, as important individual units in God's creation, they have the freedom of choice and the privilege, as well as the responsibility, of working out their own salvation. Although the law is of God, it is intended to be an aid to and not a restriction of the individual's freedom, for the individual is above the law if he is a better law unto himself.

One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it.... I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.¹⁵

Such freedom, however, brings with it an awful responsibility, and he warns his readers not to be false to the law within themselves, for each shall one day be required to give an account of himself.

At another time, in an epistle to the Corinthians, using himself as an example of the Christian in a state of grace and above the law, he writes:

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought

¹⁴I. Corinthians 3:16.

¹⁵Romans 14:5-6, 14.

under the power of any.¹⁶

And he adds, a few lines further:

For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.¹⁷

Throughout the epistles to his scattered followers Paul repeatedly emphasizes the individual's importance in the universal divine plan. The soul of each individual is important to his God, the loving Father in heaven, but it is his responsibility to earn his own salvation. Personal salvation is to be won by obeying God's will, and God's love and beneficence toward mankind is shown in his gift of a divine conscience to all men which clearly reveals to them his will. Thus, although doubly responsible, having the excuse neither of ignorance nor of lack of power, all men may rest assured of the love and benevolent intention of their Father in heaven.

It is evident from a study of Emerson's journals and early sermons that he was much attracted by the Christian doctrine of the importance of the individual. His preoccupation with the idea is evident, for references to it are scattered throughout the journal entries, and regardless of the nature of the particular

¹⁶I. Corinthians 6:12.

¹⁷I. Corinthians 7:7.

topic under discussion he seldom fails to work into his argument some aspect of the responsibility, infinitude, and essential importance of the individual. In the sermons he repeatedly points out that salvation is not to be won by the mere habitual observance of the conventional Christian duties; it is to be won only through the sincere efforts of the individual to obey God's will as it is revealed to him from within. In one of the earliest of his sermons, "On Showing Piety at Home," preached in 1827, he rebukes his audience for feeling that because they are not in great place they therefore cannot be greatly virtuous. No virtue, he explains, can properly be classified as small. "Let it be remembered that it is not ourselves so much as Providence that appoints our situation in life, that appoints us to great or to humble occasions of usefulness. But our virtue is in all cases determined by ourselves."¹⁸

Two years later in the sermon on "Summer," he repeats a favorite theme, that all nature is for the use, enjoyment, and education of individual man. Stating that "...all nature is a book on which one lesson is written," and that "this lesson is the omnipresence of God," he continues: "We have been

¹⁸ McGiffert, Young Emerson Speaks, p. 16.

looking at Nature as an exhibition of God's benevolence. It will be felt the more to be so when it is considered that the same results might have been brought about without this beauty.... To what end thus unmeasured magnificence? It is for the soul of man."¹⁹

In the sermon on "Trifles," delivered in the same year, he emphasizes even more strongly the infinitude of the common man. Rebuking his contemporaries for their preoccupation with the material things of life, he adds:

They forget in this snug accommodated well reputed way of life that they were made for sublime attainments. They forget that the watch is only a measure of time, that clothes are only for a covering, that a house is only a shelter, and that these are all the mere supply of the labourer's outward necessities so that he may go forward with his labour for moral excellence, and that it is the wildest perversion to decline from the straight path of the great ends and waste his energies on these toys of petty comforts.²⁰

Once again, in 1830, he stresses the infinite nature of the individual in the sermon "Trust Yourself," in which it may be seen that one of the primary reasons for man's self-trust, in Emerson's opinion, is that he is an individual creation of God, destined for immortality, and unlike any other being in the universe. As such a separate work of God, he must have within

¹⁹Ibid., p. 43.

²⁰Ibid., p. 49.

himself all the elements necessary for his own moral perfection, for he is as important to the universal scheme, in his proper sphere of action, as the greatest of God's creations, whether it be the sun, the moon, or the earth itself. Therefore, aware of his own potentialities, and of the necessary part that he must perform in the divine plan, man must assume his responsibilities and endeavor to fulfill the will of God as revealed to him by his innate divine guide. As Emerson explains, "If God has made us with such intention as revelation discloses, then it must be that there are in each of us all the elements of moral and intellectual excellence, that is to say, if you act out yourself, you will attain and exhibit a perfect character."²¹ Therefore, "Let him fully trust his own share of God's goodness, that if used to the uttermost, it will lead him on to a perfection which has no type yet in the universe, save only in the Divine Mind."²² And to show that essentially this is a Christian doctrine, he adds: "It is important to observe that this self-reliance which grows out of the Scripture doctrine of the value of the soul is not inconsistent either with our duties to our

²¹Ibid., 106.

²²Ibid., p. 108.

fellow men or to God."²³

Although many references to the doctrine of the importance of the individual might be cited from various ones of the remaining sermons, it is in one of his later sermons in particular that Emerson advances his most comprehensive view of the concept. "The Miracle of Our Being," delivered in 1834, might well have been entitled "On the Importance of the Individual," for that is its central theme. Relating to this theme are included many ideas, images, and aphoristic sayings now long familiar to the reader of his published essays, and it is evident that the seeds of Christian-philosophical concepts, which had early taken root, are ready to flower in the first publication of Nature and are soon to produce fully developed fruit in the subsequent Essays.

In a passage reminiscent of the fable of the One Man made up by the whole of society, with which he opens his essay on "The American Scholar," Emerson begins his sermon by informing his congregation of the dignity of human labor and the necessity for every man's doing his part, whether it be to sow the field, weave the cloth, draw the contracts, plow the sea, or throw the harpoon. There is nothing ludicrous

²³Ibid., p. 109.

about the division of human labor, he warns; the ludicrous part is in man's assumption that the performance of his particular job is the only reason for his being placed on the earth and his complete disregard of the end to which this is but the means. Those who do not perceive this end are but a higher class of animals; whereas those who reflect, who make real use of their divine gift, perceive that they are intended for a higher end than self-existence and that the world is but a means toward this end.

The man who reflects, is a man, and not an animal.... See how cunningly constructed are all things in such a manner as to make each being the centre of the Creation. You seem to be a point or focus upon which all objects, all ages concentrate their influence. Nothing past but affects you. Nothing remote but through some means reaches you.²⁴

In this way are the material world and all history for the benefit and education of the perceptive individual, regardless of his occupation or social standing. He is at all times the center of the universe, the culmination of all past history, and a moral agent directly responsible to his Creator. Therefore, says Emerson, each individual is important in his own right, and:

The perfect world exists to every man.... Quite independent of his work are his endowments. There is enough in him (grant him

²⁴Ibid., p. 207.

capable of thought and virtue) to puzzle and outwit all our philosophy. The history of one man, inasmuch as it is searching and profound, is as valuable as the history of a nation.... Thus is each man placed at the heart of the world.²⁵

(Schoolrooms and teachers, however, are useless without the presence of an apt pupil. Truth and knowledge are always available, but they must be actively sought and attained. Man is not placed here merely to see and to enjoy but also to learn and to understand. "He is not designed to be an idle eye before which nature passes in review, but is by his action enabled to learn the irresistible properties of moral nature, perceived dimly by the mind as laws difficult to be grasped or defined, yet everywhere working out their inevitable results in human affairs."²⁶ Thus, the chief duty of individual man is to learn the laws of the universe through the exercise of Reason innate within him.) In his pursuit of this knowledge, he is aided in every way possible by his benevolent Creator, first in the gift of a divine Reason, and second in the active participation of the laws themselves in his education. Man has but to act, to live, and to observe effects, and by the application of Reason to his observation he is guided

²⁵Ibid., p. 209.

²⁶Ibid.

to a perception of the causal laws, the nature and extent of which, says Emerson, can be ascertained only by action and the observance of the manner in which they determine and reward every action. Summing up his conclusions concerning the importance of the individual, he remarks:

...the moment Reason assumes its empire over a man, he finds that he has nothing low and injurious in him but it is, under this dominion, the root of power and beauty. His animal nature is ennobled by serving the soul: that which was debasing him will now prove the sinews of his character; his petulance is the love of order; out of his necessities grows the glorious structure of civilization.... And what is this admiration to which we would excite the soul? What is it but a perception of a man's true position in the Universe and his consequent obligations. This is the whole moral and end of such views as I present.²⁷

In spite of its conventional theological setting, such a presentation of his views, in its intrinsic transcendentalism, clearly anticipates many similar passages in the later essays. And the essential ingredients of the concept of the individual's true value may thus be traced directly from the New Testament teachings of Jesus through the early sermons of the young Emerson and into the final, fully developed philosophy contained in the published Essays. Jesus teaches that the individual is a divine son of God, whose duty is to perform the will of his Father as

²⁷Ibid., pp. 210-11.

revealed to him from within. Obedient to this higher law, he rises above the restrictions of man-made laws whenever there is conflict between them, for the spiritual welfare of an individual soul is of far more importance than the strict observance of arbitrary rules and conventional, orthodox regulations. Point for point Emerson echoes the essential elements of this concept in various journal passages and in several of the early sermons written before he had met with Platonic, Neoplatonic, or Oriental scriptural writings. It would therefore seem necessary to assume that the inclusion of this idea in his philosophy dated from his early reading and ministerial study of the New Testament.

Emerson's early adoption and adaptation of this concept of the individual to his own expanding philosophy was not made, however, without certain characteristic additions. The individual is not only a son of God, but each in turn is the center of the universe, the focal point of all history, the object of God's love, and the pupil for whom all material things and past events have been designed for a spiritual education. Set apart from the lower animals by the gift of divine Reason, man has but to make use of his innate guide in order to realize his divine potentialities. All nature is for his instruction, and Reason penetrates

the surfaces of nature and allows him to perceive the causal laws underlying the multiple material effects. The individual's duty, therefore, is to learn by living and acting, and to be guided in all acts by the inner divine law. As obviously "transcendental" as such thinking appears to be, it is equally obvious that the concept is almost identical with that advanced by Jesus in the annunciation of his gospel.

VI

GOOD AND EVIL

(The treatment of good and evil in the works of Emerson is but another illustration of his concept of the One Law, Unity, which prevails throughout the universe and which is the visible effect of the primal cause, the Over-Soul. As such it is closely linked with his interpretation of the law of Compensation, another aspect of the law of Unity, for as Understanding sees Compensation, polarity, and duality in this world, so it also sees good and evil, but Reason, in both instances, perceives essential unity of all things in the universe. Understanding sees Compensation as cause and effect, action and reaction, but Reason perceives that the cause and the effect are one and the same fact, and that action and reaction unite in one complete movement. Again, Understanding sees good and evil in this world, but Reason perceives both as necessary elements in the universe and as variations of the one fact coming directly from God. Thus, as cause and effect are apparent to the Understanding because of its limited and personal point of view, affected by the illusion of time and space, so good and evil are also apparent and illusionary.)

Reason perceives all to be one.

Since God, the Over-Soul, is the sustaining spirit of the universe, all within the universe is of and from God. Like God, who is self-sustaining and self-existent, the soul of the universe likewise sustains itself; all actions that take place within the universe are intended for the benefit of the whole, the Over-Soul. As a part of the whole, man participates in this beneficent tendency of the universe, but because of his limited perception he often fails to recognize the good intended for him. Against the scheme of the universe he opposes his own short-sighted, self-centered, and extremely limited idea of a personal good and calls it evil whenever his plans go awry. His real good, as well as his personal happiness, lies in his accurate perception of the aim of the whole, and by adjusting his desires and actions accordingly, he is assured of a greater good than he has ever dreamed of.

Obvious questions leap to the mind at this point, and it must be confessed that they make up the nucleus of the time-worn arguments against and the objections to the Emersonian philosophy. First, is there or is there not evil in this world? Next, does or does not man have freedom of will? Emerson's answer to these two fundamental questions may be found in almost any

one of his major essays, but he deals with them most explicitly, perhaps, in the essay on "Fate."

His answer to the first question is, No, there is no real, only apparent evil in the world. The law of opposites is an illusion of the limited perception of the Understanding; the real law is Unity as perceived by Reason. To make an exception to the law of Unity in the case of both good and evil would be a contradiction in terms. All things come from the central source, God or the Over-Soul; thus all things are one in being of and from God. Therefore, properly speaking, there is neither good nor evil but only fact. The interpretation of the fact by Understanding results in its worldly classification as good or evil. The Understanding, limited and personal, sees only limited personal ends; it is incapable of either the penetrating insight or the long-range view with which Reason perceives fact. Since the aim of the soul is self-sustenance and self-existence, or, in other words, the well-being and amelioration of the whole, then all actions of the soul must be intended for the welfare and improvement of the individual, who is an integral part of that whole. For the sake of a better term, it may be said that these actions and the presence of soul in the world are good, in that they are beneficent

and affirmative.

Some actions and events in the world are quickly recognized by the Understanding as being good because their immediate benefits are apparent and they fit the limited personal aims of men, but the events which do not happen to coincide with these limited aims are called evil. Emerson believes, however, that evil is really unperceived good, or good in the making. The aim of the soul is not only self-sustenance and self-existence but also amelioration and refinement. The fact of progress, evolution, or amelioration he finds in the history of the world of man, for as he says in the essay on "Fate:"

No statement of the Universe can have any soundness which does not admit its ascending effort. The direction of the whole and of the parts is toward benefit, and in proportion to the health. Behind every individual closes organization; before him opens liberty, - the Better, the Best. The first and worst races are dead. The second and imperfect races are dying out, or remain for the maturing of higher.... Liberation of the will from the sheaths and clogs of organization which he has outgrown, is the end and aim of this world.¹

Since refinement and progressive improvement is the aim of the soul, the purpose in this world of what the Understanding designates as evil may be seen, for certainly man would have made no progress without frequent prods and urgings. To strengthen and to

¹Works, VI, 35-36.

develop, man has had to overcome the obstacles provided by nature for his education, but he has also found that he has been furnished with a means for overcoming each obstruction on every occasion. Thus the primary end of nature's lessons is to teach man to know his own capabilities. In looking at the Universal Plan from this point of view, with the aid of Reason, one perceives that the diseases, the natural calamities, the fierceness and overwhelming power of the natural elements themselves, serve as harsh but effective training aids for the race of man. The natural law may be harsh on the individual, but its aim is the good of the whole. The individual may perish, but the race progresses.

In ~~such~~ a manner has the race steadily progressed, each generation better in some ways than the last, but each being the best for its day and time. Amelioration is marked by the gradual but inevitable subjugation of the natural world to the mind of man as the representative of Intellect. Nature, says Emerson, is no sentimentalist and does not pamper us, and in man's conquest of nature, as in any war, he must suffer casualties. But are death, mutilation, suffering, such great evils when compared to the grand aim? Death itself is but the returning to one's source, which is God, and can therefore hardly be interpreted

as an evil. The soul offers compensations for mutilations, patience for the endurance of suffering, and if either is unbearable, relief and release in death. The conquest of nature also involves the conquest of reactionary backward races by a more advanced race, and in the very process of extending its dominion, the race temporarily favored spreads its cultural benefits among other peoples and sows the seeds for its own eventual overthrow by some future superior race. War itself is but one more lesson necessary for the instruction of mankind, and in the spirit of, "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out," the race of man has unconsciously progressed by destroying the parts of itself which were holding it back. All works unconsciously for the amelioration and progress of the race, and the self-interest of men is only one of the tools employed by the Universal Intellect for the accomplishment of its Grand Design. Therefore, says Emerson, the moral status of any given civilization is relative and conditional. "The population of the world is a conditional population; not the best, but the best that could live now; and the scale of tribes, and the steadiness with which victory adheres to one tribe and defeat to another, is as uniform as the superposition of strata."²

²Ibid., p. 16.

(As society advances in an amoeba-like progress, certain individuals fail to keep up with the moral standards of any given period.) Their moral standards are those of a by-gone era, and society punishes them for their brutish instincts and their lack of cooperation with the community. Evil is therefore a relative term, and the apparent evil that is evident in the hearts of men is really the absence of good, the lack of that amount of virtue which society now requires according to its present standards or ideals. Likewise, what society calls "good" is that which nearest approaches its present ideal. Thus the distinction between good and evil made by the Understanding is relative even in worldly terms.

The petty personal evils of which men continually complain are, for the most part, merely illusions, resulting from their inability to perceive the real good intended for them. Their evils and inconveniences result from their working against the beneficent power which has their good as its end. Their perception of and cooperation with this higher law would eliminate all their evils and give them additional power and greater personal happiness. As Emerson explains:

The divine order does not stop where their sight stops. The friendly power works on the same rules in the next farm and the next planet. But where they have not experience they run against it and hurt themselves. Fate then is a name for facts not yet passed

under the fire of thought; for causes which are unpenetrated. But every jet of chaos which threatens to exterminate us is convertible by intellect into wholesome force.³

With the exercise of Reason, men may perceive this higher law and will likewise see that in this world the auxiliary law of Compensation and balance takes effect, for:

There is adjustment between the animal and its food, its parasite, its enemy. Balances are kept. It is not allowed to diminish in numbers, nor to exceed. The like adjustments exist for man.... His instincts must be met, and he has predisposing power that bends and fits what is near him to his use. He is not possible until the invisible things are right for him, as well as the visible.⁴

Since men may thus be assured that they are supported and sustained by Universal Law itself, they may likewise realize that no real harm can come to them except through their own actions, their refusal to work in harmony with this law. The aim of the universe is the good of the whole, which, naturally, includes the good of all its parts. Therefore, says Emerson in "Illusions," the wise man will perceive that "If life seems a succession of dreams, yet poetic justice is done in dreams also. The visions of good men are good; it is the undisciplined will that is whipped with bad thoughts and bad fortunes. When we

³Ibid., pp. 31-32.

⁴Ibid., pp. 37-38.

break the laws, we lose our hold on the central reality."⁵

In answer to the question concerning the reality of evil in the world, Emerson has replied, first, that the distinctions between good and evil made by the Understanding are relative, but that Reason perceives Unity as the real law and, since the One works for the good of the One, a positive good is the intention of the Over-Soul. Apparent evil in man, then, is but the absence of good, relatively speaking, and apparent evil in circumstances is but illusion or good in the making, unperceived by man's Understanding. Reason, or man's capacity to perceive the law of Unity, will enable him to see the divine plan and to work in harmony with it, receiving his proportionate share of divine power and its accompanying blessing.

At first it might be objected that man is little better off than the rat in a laboratory maze, rewarded for every right turn, punished for every false one, and with only the one chance to find the solution. But the whole of Emerson's philosophy must be remembered. Man is neither blind nor unguided; he is born with a radar-like conscience and an intuitive perception

⁵Ibid., p. 322.

which enables him to distinguish right from wrong. He has only to follow the dictates of his inner guide to be always on the right path, the one which eventually leads to his greatest good as an integral part of the whole. Yet, the decision whether or not to obey his conscience is entirely up to him. He has the freedom of will to choose either the immediate, personal, limited, and apparent good of this world or the good which is but half-perceived but which his intuition assures him awaits in the future. If man chooses to live on the higher level of being, the spiritual life, according to the revelations of innate Reason, the apparent evils of this world no longer exist for him, for he perceives their lack of real substance. If instead, however, he elects to lead the material life, guided only by the restricted views of the Understanding, he then falls under the law of Compensation, of cause and effect, and must take the evil along with the good. Thus, the life of man is much like the narrow, smooth path which fords a river. Guided and given specific instructions, man can cross the river with no harm, meeting no obstacles, provided he follows instructions. Paying no heed to any advice but that of his own headstrong will, however, man stumbles and flounders, encountering obstructions and sinkholes which seem to have been put purposely in his

path by a malignant fate. Both men are destined to reach the other side, but the one has a far easier journey than the other.

What the ordinary man stumbles over because he cannot see, Emerson calls fate. Fate, he says, is the name for facts not yet passed under the fire of thought, for causes which are unpenetrated. Fate, then, is another illusion of the Understanding. The individual who relies only on his Understanding feels hemmed in by fate, but he who relies on Reason rises above fate's apparent restrictions. It might be said that man's free will is a part of fate, for at any time he can release himself from its restraints. "Intellect annuls Fate," says Emerson. "So far as a man thinks, he is free."⁶ Thus, fate is really only that which man does not comprehend. Like Compensation, it is a law apparent in the material world but is actually only one subordinate aspect of the higher law of Unity. Pointing out the relationship to Unity of what is commonly called fate, Emerson writes:

The element running through entire nature, which we popularly call Fate, is known to us as limitation. Whatever limits us we call Fate.... The limitations refine as the soul purifies, but the ring of necessity is always perched at the top.... And last of all, high over thought, in the world of morals, Fate appears as vindicator, levelling the high,

⁶ibid., p. 23.

lifting the low, requiring justice in man, and always striking soon or late when justice is not done. What is useful will last, what is hurtful will sink.⁷

Fate, therefore, like the retributive law of Compensation, is but another means by which Unity or the Over-Soul carries out the divine plan, a design which must inevitably be fulfilled. Ultimately, man cannot oppose his will against the will of God, but within the limited sphere of his own being he has freedom of choice. Fate is the unseen schoolmaster working in conjunction with nature to educate man. Its aim is his final good, and its lessons raise his conduct to a higher standard. "The right use of Fate is to bring up our conduct to the loftiness of nature,"⁸ Emerson remarks. Once the lessons are learned, man will no longer rely on Understanding only but will apply his innate perception to penetrate the secrets of the universe and will be rewarded with a perfect comprehension of the truth of ultimate Unity. Such a comprehension annuls fate and frees the individual.

The revelation of Thought takes man out of servitude into freedom.... The day of days, the great day of the feast of life, is that in which the inward eye opens to the Unity in things, to the omnipresence of law: - sees that what is must be and ought to be, or is the best. This beatitude dips from on

⁷Ibid., pp. 20-21.

⁸Ibid., p. 24.

high down on us and we see. It is not in us so much as we are in it....⁹

The bulky shadow of fate is thus rendered transparent by man's innate Reason, and with the elimination of the imaginary apparition of fate comes complete freedom. All is governed by the one law of Unity, or as Emerson names it in this instance, the Beautiful Necessity. Echoing the words of the New Testament, he adds in a final note of warning:

And the moral is that what we seek we shall find; what we flee from flees from us; as Goethe said, "what we wish for in youth, comes in heaps on us in old age," too often cursed with the granting of our prayer: and hence the high caution, that since we are sure of having what we wish, we beware to ask only for high things.¹⁰

The evils that beset man in this world are the lessons of fate intended for his education into a higher sphere of thought, and they are the result only of his failure to follow the guidance of Reason. Therefore, since evil, like the trip to the woodshed, is intended for the ultimate good of the victim, Emerson sees no cause for designating it an independent malignant force.

The fully developed concept of good and evil, as it is presented in the Essays, is obviously not

⁹Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 46-47.

taken directly from the New Testament, for it has been greatly influenced by his reading in the Oriental scriptures and by his own thinking, but the germinal idea, the basic distinction between good and evil and the positive quality of good, the negative of evil, seems to have been accepted by Emerson as he found it in the New Testament before he began his studies of the Oriental scriptures. His later studies merely confirmed his first impressions, provided illustrations or "proofs" of their validity, and suggested correlative ideas for their logical expansion and development.

Perhaps enough has already been said, in a previous chapter on Compensation, about Jesus's treatment of good as a positive force in the world, intended for the well-being of the All rather than the individual, and his identification of evil as something negative and selfish. Jesus, however, does not altogether eliminate evil as a thing in itself; it is an active principle in the world, inspired by the Prince of Darkness. As an orthodox minister Emerson at first accepted this view of good and evil, even as he at first accepted the idea that a complete compensation or retribution could occur only after death, but further study convinced him of the essential non-existence of evil in the world as an active force.

If out of evil can come good, then wherein lies the essential badness of so-called evil? His answer was based on the teaching of Jesus, that evil is negative and the relative absence of the divine principle.

Apparent evil is therefore only an illusion, and worldly evils are but part of the divine scheme intended for the good of all. Emerson's elimination of evil as a separate entity was thus a gradual development in his philosophy, the progress of which can be traced in the journals and early sermons.

(The basic concept of good and evil held by Jesus, as it is set forth in the New Testament, is closely related to the law of Compensation, showing that in the opinion of Jesus the distinction is evident in this world but does not hold in the spiritual world.)

Evil, whenever mentioned by Jesus, applies to the things of the material world and is evident in the actions and thoughts of men when they become too much attached to material possessions and physical pleasures. Good is of God and, with the individual's renunciation of self and the elimination of mundane thoughts, completely drives out evil. Good is positive and immediately predominates upon the slightest restriction of evil. In the spiritual world there is no place for evil, since it is earthbound by its attachment to the physical world. Furthermore, the individual who leads

the complete life of the spirit here on earth, who practices self-renunciation, automatically enters into the kingdom of God, which is within, and into which evil cannot enter. Therefore, it may be seen that in the system taught by Jesus there are two worlds, the material, in which good and evil are both evident, and the spiritual, in which a higher good only is present. In essence it is exactly the concept adopted by Emerson in his distinction between the world of the Understanding, in which the illusory good and evil are apparent, and the world of Reason, in which both are perceived to blend into the one Good.

Although exception might be made to the statement, it would seem that Jesus nowhere concerns himself overmuch with the question of man's freedom of will. It can be assumed from his teachings that the will of God is supreme but that man does have a limited freedom within the framework of the divine plan, for the theme of all Jesus's sermons is the necessity for man to seek and to perform the will of his Father in order to obtain immediate peace, happiness, and eternal life. Yet, the will of the Father must inevitably be done, and man's happiness depends on his willing acceptance of the divine will. It remained for his chief interpreter, Paul, to make an issue of the point, and it is in the writings of Paul that predestination

and man's freedom of will are discussed most. Paul, it will be remembered, was Emerson's favorite New Testament writer and the one most often mentioned in his journals. Therefore, for the interpretation of Jesus's concept of good and evil and of predestination and free will that most probably influenced the early thinking of Emerson, the writings of Paul must be studied.

In the epistle to the Romans, Paul first sets forth the inevitability of God's law. The law prevails whether or not men acknowledge it. To the Jews, as the chosen race, was given the law, but in the hearts of all men the law is inscribed, so that he who obeys the law, whether he be Jew or Gentile, shall attain peace and blessing. Those who disobey the law shall reap anguish and tribulation. Thus all men are equally responsible to the law, whether they are of the chosen race or not, and the law of Compensation takes immediate effect as an auxiliary agent of the primary law of God. Knowing the law but deliberately choosing to disobey it, men have no just complaint against the inevitable retribution which follows upon their own disobedience.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen,

being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.¹¹

Identifying the law with truth itself, Paul warns that such disobedience of God's law brings inevitable retribution upon the head of the offender, even as obedience of the law brings inevitable reward and divine blessing. He tells the Roman converts that by their impenitence they are storing up for themselves divine wrath, against the day of wrath, the revelation of the judgment of God:

Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile, But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.... For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.¹²

Good and evil, in the theology of Paul, are respectively the performance and the non-performance, the obedience and the disobedience, of God's law. Whether perceived or not, the eternal law prevails, "For what, if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?"¹³ But

¹¹Romans 1:18-20.

¹²Romans 2:6-10, 13.

¹³Romans 3:3.

man has the freedom to rebel against the law and, without the excuse of ignorance, to suffer the consequences. The positive nature of good and the negative of evil are here self-evident. Evil is not a thing in itself, however; faith, which is a higher understanding equivalent to Emerson's Reason, rises above the auxiliary law of Compensation as it appears in this world to a state of perfect harmony and union with the divine law. Such perfect acceptance of and harmony with the law eliminates the purpose of evil, and, therefore, for one who has attained the state of grace, evil no longer exists. In the words of Paul, "...a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law,"¹⁴ and, "...where no law is, there is no transgression."¹⁵ He makes this distinction even more evident in the epistle to the Galatians, wherein he states that faith supersedes the law which was intended for the education of man. Extending Jesus's statement that he had come not to nullify the law but to fulfill it, Paul explains:

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that

¹⁴Romans 3:28.

¹⁵Romans 4:15.

faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.¹⁶

Beneath the layer of early Christian theology it is not difficult to perceive in Paul's remarks the essence of Emerson's own concept of good and evil, for in Emersonian terminology the law of God becomes the Universal Law of Unity or the Over-Soul, within whose framework man has a limited freedom of choice, although his well-being and personal happiness lie in a complete, willing submission to it. In the material world of Understanding the law works as a schoolmaster instructing man by means of the auxiliary law of Compensation, but once he follows unquestioningly the guidance of the divinity within him, he automatically enters a higher plane of life, lives in complete harmony with the law, and in effect becomes at one with the Over-Soul.

Having defined the law in its larger aspects, Paul proceeds to analyze its auxiliary parts and its effects. He continues to place emphasis on the main theme, that the duty and happiness of man lie in joyful obedience to the law, but he also provides

¹⁶Galatians 3:23-26, 28.

ample illustrations of the workings and effects of the law in the material world. Perfect obedience to the law brings the individual to such a state of grace and communion with God that evil no longer exists for him, but to obtain perfection is exceedingly difficult for the soul as long as it is confined in and held down by the physical body. As long as the living soul remains in the body, says Paul, there seems to be a division within the individual. The soul, which aspires to the good, struggles against the physical wants and sensual desires of the body. The actions of the soul in its aspiration toward the good are therefore good; whereas the actions of the body in search of material comforts and physical pleasures are evil, evil because they hinder the soul from rising to the good in union with God and in complete fulfillment of the law. If it were not for this, there would be no evil. (Evil exists only as a negative quality, as far as the soul is concerned, for it prevents the soul from fully obeying the law. Likewise, if there were no law there would be no evil, so Paul informs his congregation, "For without the law, sin was dead."¹⁷ Therefore, with the release of the soul from its confinement, it is no longer aware of

¹⁷Romans 7:8.

evil, and with the elimination of the hindrance to the soul's obedience, evil itself ceases to exist. In living man, however, the dual natures seem to exist, confesses Paul, even in himself:

I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.¹⁸

The only answer, claims Paul, is the practice of self-renunciation, the subjection of the physical body to the soul, which will bring infinite consolation in the form of compensation, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."¹⁹ Bringing the body under submission will free the soul and aid it in its ascension toward God, an immediate compensation being the enlargement of the soul itself and an increased degree of inner guidance, peace, and power. By working in harmony with God's law the individual receives as his own good all the benefits which the filial obedience of the law affords, for "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God...."²⁰ In all things, then, the

¹⁸Romans 7:21-23.

¹⁹Romans 8:18.

²⁰Romans 8:28.

individual is to renounce self and concentrate on his pursuit of the spiritual life. The law is within.

"The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart....,"²¹ so "be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."²²

Several minor points in the writings of Paul which found their way into Emerson's own philosophy may be mentioned but need not be dwelt upon here. For example, Emerson states that within man lies the potentiality for successfully overcoming any obstacle which he encounters in his lifetime. Paul says, in a letter to the Corinthians, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."²³ Emerson speaks of the Beneficent Necessity which works for the good of the All. Paul writes in the second letter to the Corinthians, "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might, through

²¹Romans 10:8.

²²Romans 12:2.

²³1. Corinthians 10:13.

the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God."²⁴ And in an assertion that must have appealed to Emerson's idealism, Paul adds, "...we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."²⁵ Again, speaking of the inevitability of the law and of the positive nature of truth, both of which are in Emerson's philosophy, he says, "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth."²⁶ And finally, in closing his letter to the Galatians, Paul stresses what became one of Emerson's most favored doctrines, the importance of the individual:

But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden.²⁷

It seems clear that the essential elements of Emerson's concept of good and evil as presented in his published works are to be found in the New Testament. The well-known pattern of his method of study is once more apparent in this instance, for, as usual with Emerson, the first entries in his journals occur long

²⁴ II. Corinthians 4:15.

²⁵ II. Corinthians 4:18.

²⁶ II. Corinthians 13:8.

²⁷ Galatians 6:4-5.

before his more considered opinions appear in the early sermons. Beginning in the journal for the year 1824, his serious consideration of the idea and its various aspects, obviously taken from and often supported by texts from the New Testament, may easily be traced through the journals for the following years up to and beyond that for the year 1830 in which he first became acquainted with the work of De Gérando. After 1830 the concept changes very little but does receive additional support from the writings of both the Greeks and the Orientals. Although important references to the concept of good and evil occur in the journals as early as 1824, no results of his thinking appear in a sermon until 1829.

At first Emerson skirts around the central concept by treating its many aspects. For example, in the 1824 journal he discusses the prevalence of virtue in the world, the presence of evil as an agent of Providence in the education of man, the providential use of ignorance as an innate appetite in man to inspire him to seek truth, the aim of his education as being self-denial and unselfishness, and, finally, the identification of the God of Revelation with the God of Nature. Of the positive quality of good or virtue, he says, "In God's system, the virtue pervades the whole world, and none so poor as not to

partake....²⁸ And referring to the law of Compensation by which Providence makes use of evil to educate the individual, he remarks:

Providence supports, but does not spoil its children.... There is ever good in store for those who love it; knowledge for those who seek it; and if we do evil, we suffer the consequences of evil. Throughout the administration of the world there is the same aspect of stern kindness; of good against your will; good against your good; ten thousand channels of active beneficence, but all flowing with the same regard to general, not particular, profit....²⁹

Since the aim of Providence is the good of the whole, which includes the good of the individual, the aim of man's education is not so much to discover truth, which is not affected in the least by man's knowledge or ignorance, but to educate his mind to a more perfect perception of the truth. Although the beneficence of Providence is revealed by its gift of an affirmative and positive intellect and its use of pleasure and pain, reward and punishment, as the tutors of man, in order to earn credit for the attainment of this perception, man may gain it only as a result of his own efforts. In a long passage in the journal for this year, Emerson argues:

It is a striking feature in our condition that we so hardly arrive at truth.... The

²⁸Journals, 11, 7.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 11-12.

final cause of this is, no doubt, found in the doctrine that we were not sent into this world for the discovery of truth, but for the education of our minds, and our faculties are best exercised by doubts, not by facts. The immediate consequence of this arrangement, like all other parts of human nature, has its admixture of evil.... And to such an extent is this great statute policy of God carried, that many, nay, most of the great blessings of humanity require cycles of a thousand years to bring them to their height.... Thus, too, God has done with the religious education of men; he has sowed truth in the world, but has let them arrive at it by the slow instrumentality of human research.³⁰

(One of the primary aids to man in his progressive self-education is the innate desire to know truth. Ignorance, says Emerson, is merely the absence of knowledge, but the tendency is toward the gradual perception of truth even as the tendency is toward the eventual good of the All. Ignorance, like evil, is negative, and the positive aspiration for knowledge is present in the souls of all men.)

Ignorance is not a malady contracted on the earth, nor an incidental defect foreign to the purpose of our existence, but is an original want with which we were created, and which it is a chief business of life to supply. As hunger stimulates us to procure the food appointed for our sustenance, ignorance is but an appetite which God made us to gratify....³¹

The ultimate aim of Providence is the education of man to a perception of truth and unity. He must

³⁰Ibid., pp. 9, 12, 13.

³¹Ibid., p. 20.

perceive that the God of Revelation and the God of Nature as discovered by Science are one and the same God. After serious consideration of the discrepancies between the orthodox conception of God and the natural or scientific view of the God of Nature, Emerson concludes that the Scriptures should be read in the light of natural truth in order to perceive the real unity of God, for, "...that the administration of eternity is fickle; that the God of Revelation hath seen cause to repent and botch up the ordinances of the God of Nature - I hold it not irreverent, but impious in us to assume."³²

Although there are scattered references to the concept of good and evil in the journal for the year 1825, there is little apparent development of the idea until 1826 when he becomes interested in the relativity of good and evil. In a discussion of the law of Compensation, he declares, "Our nature has a twofold aspect, towards self and towards society; and the good or evil...is to be measured, of course, by its relation to these two."³³ A little later he states even more forthrightly: "For me, I hold fast to my old faith, that to each soul is a solitary law,

³²Ibid., p. 32.

³³Ibid., p. 75.

a several universe.... My innocence, to one of more opportunity, shall be guilt."³⁴

In this year he is more concerned, however, with the providential purpose of the education of man. In one place he says, "If the secrets of external nature were disclosed, there were no science to discipline our minds,"³⁵ and more fully in another, he states:

It is an important observation that though our perception of moral truth is instinctive, and we do not owe to education our approbation of truth or our abhorrence of ingratitude, yet we are not born to any image of perfect virtue. We recognize with faithful readiness the virtue and the vice of action presented to us, but we need a learned experience to enumerate all the particulars that make the whole of virtue.³⁶

And again, a few lines further, he identifies truth with virtue, knowledge with goodness, so that an increase of man's knowledge therefore brings an automatic increase of his virtue. "The whole of truth," he says, "...will not probably be found injurious to the whole of virtue. They will be found to be seal and print. It is the necessary consequence of this doctrine, that a great progress of knowledge...will be a great progress in goodness."³⁷

³⁴Ibid., p. 77.

³⁵Ibid., p. 78.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 89-90.

³⁷Ibid., p. 92.

Often throughout the year he returns to a consideration of the nature of good and evil, undoubtedly occasioned by the approach of his ministerial duties and inspired by his study of the Bible. In the summer of this year his study of Proverbs prompted him to reflect on the connection between the soul and virtue. He arrived at a conclusion now familiar to all his readers. Virtue is positive and aids the soul; whereas vice is negative and impedes the soul. For,

...moral actions seem not a mere bundle of facts, but of relations, relations to something unseen, and because thus related to something to which the body was not, possess for themselves a principle of life in which the body had no share. Since Virtue was imperishable, every act contrary to it would seem to tend to the destruction of the agent. Vice is the soul's suicide.³⁸

Summarizing his conclusions concerning the related concepts of the infinitude of the common man, the importance of the individual, and the educational purpose of evil in the world, he identifies Christianity with the moral code: "Christianity...makes one with the moral code.... The doctrine of immortality...illuminates and ennobles the existence of man. This solves the question concerning the existence of evil. For if man is immortal, this world is his place of discipline and the value of pain is then disclosed."³⁹

³⁸Ibid., pp. 98-99.

³⁹Ibid., p. 120.

Two years later, in the journal for 1828, Emerson further identifies conscience as an agent of God or the soul, saying that as a child is connected to its mother's womb by the umbilical cord, so man is joined to God by the conscience. For "God has given him free agency, has permitted him to work his will in the world - doing wrong or right, but has kept open this door by which he may come in at all times and visit his sins with distress, or his virtues with pleasant thoughts."⁴⁰

It is not until the following year, 1829, that the results of Emerson's thinking on the subject of good and evil begin to appear directly in the sermons. In the second part of "The Christian Minister," delivered early that year, he treats of the positive nature and effect of virtue and of the negative quality of evil, which is the absence of virtue, a point which was soon to find expression in Nature and the first of the Essays. In his explanation of the duties of a Christian minister, he compares virtue and vice respectively to light and darkness caused by the presence or absence of the sun's rays. Evil or vice as a separate entity is only another of life's illusions.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 248.

If we did not die life in its long course would be sermon and monition enough; the moral laws of God would assert themselves by their effects: virtue would be seen to produce happiness, and the want of virtue to inflict woe, as undeniably as the sun produces light and the absence of the sun produces darkness. But life is short and we hardly get over its illusions before it is time to put on our shroud.⁴¹

Later, in the 1830 sermon entitled "The Individual and the State," he emphasizes even more clearly the affirmative and generative quality of virtue as a moral agent of God: "Nothing in this world ends in itself. High virtue will surely be attended with deep respect. It is of God and cannot be overlooked.... Virtue tends to create virtue as surely as vice to beget vice."⁴²

In still another sermon, "Religious Liberalism and Rigidity," also delivered in 1830, he makes even greater use of a similar device to illustrate the use of pleasure and pain in this world. As vice is the absence of virtue, and as evil is the absence of good, so pain is the absence of pleasure and results from either ignorance or the abuse of nature. Citing the Bible as scriptural proof of his conclusions, he points out the beneficent intention of God toward his creatures in granting to them innate faculties and

⁴¹ McGiffert, Young Emerson Speaks, p. 35.

⁴² Ibid., p. 80.

capacities which are capable of growth and development to the highest degree. Pain, by punishing man's misuse of his faculties, serves as a warning guide to keep him on the path to growth, progress, and development of virtue.

A mind of generous nature is early taught to contemplate with delight and reverence its own faculties...., to believe, that, as God gave them, they are imperfect copies of his own perfections; ...that as the world is full of contrivances for use and pleasure, and not one for pain, (pain only resulting from some ignorance or abuse of nature) it is reasonable to think that he designed always the happiness of his children; that as we possess freedom and as all those powers are extremely susceptible of cultivation, that nothing can be more manifest than that we should become more wise, more true, more just...every day.... And if the good, the exaltation, the felicity of man is the object of God's arrangements concerning him..., then a sufficient reason is given for the existence of all pain, because it is all of use.... These views also claim in their behalf the strong testimony of the Scriptures.⁴³

Throughout the sermon "Find Your Calling," delivered in 1832, he summarizes many of the thoughts recorded in the journals. He remarks on the beneficence of the Divine Will, the education of man as being the purpose of life in this world, the freedom of man's will within this sphere, the happiness resulting from complete reliance on God's will, and the fact that the individual may know the intimations of the Divine

⁴³Ibid., pp. 84-85.

Will by consulting his own mind. Contained within the sermon are such references to minor aspects of his concept of good and evil as the following:

And if men would regard it, it would comfort them to see that all this apparent disorder of innumerable uncontrolled actions resolves itself into a great order and is made by the Divine Wisdom to produce the most beneficent results.

In the fact that the human character is much affected by the accidents of country, parentage and the like we trace the Divine Wisdom operating a progressive education of the race.

Many mistakes may be made in the search but every man who consults himself, the intimations of Divine Wisdom in his own mind, will constantly approach it.

Be content then, humbly and wisely to converse with yourself.... Go forward and accept the gift of the creation and resign yourself to his will by obeying the promptings of the mind.

And, finally, repeating his favorite metaphor of positive and negative mathematical symbols in reference to the high calling of the individual soul, he says:

Once more, this the high calling of every soul is not in heaven, or over the sea, or existing in a heated imagination or in a remote future, it may be served in this life as well as in the next. It begins to be served whenever a man begins to act according to his conscience and he is leaving it whenever he violates his conscience.⁴⁴

It is not difficult to perceive Emerson's customary method of study, thought, development, and eventual use of concepts originally taken from the New Testament.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 163, 164, 167, 168, 169.

Once accepted, these ideas seem to have simmered quietly in his mind, ridding themselves of obvious errors, and gaining strength from his further reading and synthesizing thought until they begin to make an appearance in the journals. After another period of speculative and generative thought, they eventually find complete expression in the sermons, lectures, and published Essays. The same pattern has been followed in the case of the concept of good and evil, for, as has been shown, the essential elements of the idea are contained in Paul's New Testament interpretation of Jesus's doctrines, they are recorded in the journals written during the years when Emerson was seriously studying the Bible in preparation for the ministry, and they are expressed in a well-developed and fully thought-out form in the sermons of his early years as an active minister. Even after the year 1830, during which he first became acquainted with De Gérando's book on Platonic and Oriental philosophy, the concept remains essentially the same except that he now substitutes the aphoristic sayings of his favorite Greeks or Orientals for the former Bible references employed in the journal entries.

VII

THE TEACHING METHODS OF EMERSON AND JESUS

(Much has been written concerning the style of Emerson, and the essential elements of his method of presentation and organization have long been familiar to the student of his works; yet most critics seem to have felt that, in spite of its effectiveness in particular instances, his method of presenting a series of simple, fragmentary, aphoristic sentences, all aiming at the central thought of his paragraph but none quite stating the whole truth, was rather the result of haste, careless organization, and general disinterest in the attention to detail and tight, logical construction of argument considered necessary in conventional forms of polemic, than an effective, well-considered, and equally logical truth-telling method of instruction in itself. Scholars accustomed to the logical and conventional organization of contemporary essays, and well-informed in the italicized preaching style employed by Puritan and Unitarian ministers, saw an apparent absence of any method in Emerson's essays primarily because a comparable system of organization was obviously not present.)

Actually, however, his manner of presentation and organization is closely associated with one of the basic concepts of his philosophy. All truth, he says, is one and eternal, but the whole truth cannot be absolutely perceived and stated by any human being, restricted as he is by earthly bonds. The best that the individual can hope to do is to report truths or glimpses of the truth, seen from different points of view, but all reflecting particular aspects of the one truth. Thus Emerson chooses as a symbol of truth a sphere comprised of multiple concentric circles; every individual truth or natural fact is but Absolute Truth seen from one restricted point of view. In "Nature" Emerson presents a clearly defined description of truth as a unified, all-inclusive sphere:

A rule of one art, or a law of one organization, holds true throughout nature.... Every universal truth which we express in words, implies or supposes every other truth.... It is like a great circle on a sphere, comprising all possible circles; which, however, may be drawn and comprise it in like manner. Every such truth is the absolute Ens seen from one side. But it has innumerable sides.¹

And again in "Nature," using the same image without its transcendental refinement, he says: "God is the all-fair. Truth, and goodness, and beauty, are but different faces of the same All."²

¹Works, I, 44.

²Ibid., p. 24.

(Thus truth is one and eternal, and all partial truths knowable in the material world are but incomplete glimpses of the Absolute. Yet the fact that all truth is one is reason for optimism, for since natural facts and scientific laws must be part of the vast sphere, a steady pursuit and an increased comprehension of such truths must eventually lead to a better understanding of the whole. Not only does the learning of the world make up one brief arc in the sphere of truth, but since the universe is composed of two elements, nature and soul, both being necessary and complementary halves of the whole, every natural fact or scientific truth must be a complement and a symbol of some spiritual fact. Therefore, once man has gained a complete comprehension of the things of the world through the exercise of his Understanding, he may likewise gain at least a partial perception of spiritual truth through the application of Reason,) for as Emerson remarks: "Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact.... The world is emblematic.... The laws of moral nature answer to those of matter as face to face in a glass."³

The world of material fact, he explains, would have no existence were it not for the sustaining

³ Ibid., pp. 26, 32-33.

influence of the spiritual world. Every natural fact is thus the incarnation of spirit in a material form. Consequently, although man may comprehend the fact itself merely by employing Understanding, the application of Reason will enable him to perceive the sustaining spirit of truth underlying the physical form of the material fact. Still retaining the spherical symbol of the oneness of truth, Emerson states:

A fact is the end or last issue of spirit. The visible creation is the terminus or the circumference of the invisible world.... A life in harmony with Nature, the love of truth and of virtue, will purge the eyes to understand her text. By degrees we may come to know the primitive sense of the permanent objects of nature, so that the world shall be to us an open book, and every form significant of its hidden life and final cause.⁴

In spite of occasional attempts to describe the indescribable in idealistic, transcendental terms, Emerson usually makes a conscious effort to state the higher truths of his philosophy in terms of common understanding. His method of illustrating these truths by using the laws of physics, of trade, and of history as symbols of moral truths is but the application of his philosophical concept that all natural facts are symbols of spiritual facts. Having gained certain perceptions of moral truth, he attempts

⁴Ibid., pp. 34-35.

to translate them back into symbolic facts of common experience for the better understanding of this truth by men. In this sense his commonplace phrases are in reality apt and highly concentrated parables strikingly similar in effect to the longer parables of Jesus. In "Nature," for example, to illustrate the concept of apparent dualism in the world, he carefully explains to his down-to-earth audience, in terms reminiscent of the metaphorical language of the New Testament:

Certain mechanical changes, a small alteration in our local position, apprises us of a dualism.... A man who seldom rides, needs only to get into a coach and traverse his own town, to turn the street into a puppet-show.... What new thoughts are suggested by seeing a face of country quite familiar, in the rapid movement of the railroad car! ... In these cases, by mechanical means, is suggested the difference between the observer and the spectacle - between man and nature.⁵

Probably the most familiar element in Emerson's style is his use of aphoristic phrases so apt and so quotable that they have become common expressions of everyday speech. Mark Twain's humorous comment that the works of Shakespeare were nothing but a collection of stale quotations might well have been repeated of Emerson's essays. That such a trick of style was intentional and not the result of a personal idiosyncrasy is evident from Emerson's own words. Through-

⁵Ibid., pp. 50-51.

out his works he praises the homely proverbs of folk-wisdom as containing the essence of worldly truth and as being representative of universal laws. In the essay "Compensation" he lists a series of such common sayings in support of that law. And in "Nature" he extends his classification to include not only proverbs, but also other expressions of folk-wisdom:

In like manner, the memorable words of history and the proverbs of nations consist usually of a natural fact, selected as a picture or parable of a moral truth. Thus; A rolling stone gathers no moss; A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush...and the like. In their primary sense these are trivial facts, but we repeat them for the value of their analogical import. What is true of proverbs, is true of all fables, parables, and allegories.⁶

In his own epigrammatic, aphoristic sentences, he aims at a similar condensation of factual truth representative of spiritual laws. Thus, such a phrase as his "An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man," with all its ramifications of thought, is equal in connotative value to the saying "A rolling stone gathers no moss," but a sentence such as "The simplest person who in his integrity worships God, becomes God" contains the essence of an entire religious philosophy.

Another common element of Emerson's style is his method of aiming a series of epigrammatic, aphoristic

⁶ Ibid., p. 33.

sentences at the central thought of the paragraph. Each sentence expresses a slightly different view of the spiritual truth which he wishes to illustrate, his aim being to instruct his audience in this truth by providing tangible hints or clues which when followed to their source will lead to a complete comprehension of its reality, very much as a geometer plots the center of a circle by following the radii to their point of intersection. In the same manner, on a slightly larger scale, the thoughts or partial statements of the truth contained in the paragraphs all aim at the illustration of the central truth advanced in the essay. It is by this collation of intuitive perceptions and glimpses of truth, Emerson feels, that the individual may best arrive at the nearest possible approximation of Absolute Truth. Therefore, his teaching method consists of employing a series of easily comprehended, self-evident truths which when understood in context by the reader or listener clearly reveals the presence of a beneficent tendency, a higher truth, or universal law underlying, uniting, and shining through these natural facts. To state baldly and straightforwardly the spiritual truths which in reality are the basic concepts of his philosophy would have been to alienate the larger part of his orthodox audience. To avoid this occupational

hazard of the mystic-philosopher, he wisely chose to imitate the method of Jesus and other effective teachers by advancing his doctrines in the guise of simple folk-wisdom, aphoristic parables, and epigrammatic shafts of self-evident truth. It is true that many have chosen to read and interpret Emerson's essays in the light of Understanding alone and have been either satisfied or disgusted with a brand of practical philosophy considered typically American from the days of Benjamin Franklin to the present, but that a higher and more spiritual philosophy is present and intended is evident to any but the most superficial reader. That the teaching of moral truth in the guise of parables, fables, and allegorical anecdotes is a method as old as wisdom-literature itself will scarcely be challenged by any reader familiar with the fables of Aesop, the teachings of Confucius, and the parables of Jesus.

In all ages the element of story has appealed to man, and the wisest teachers have always readily availed themselves of this weakness in man's armor to implant in him the rudiments, at least, of moral philosophy. The favorite teaching device of Jesus was the parable, a simple tale illustrating a moral truth or exemplifying a rule of conduct, and with a few exceptions, most of the recorded words of Jesus

are contained within these brief, well-remembered moral tales. His simple and entertaining style of teaching won him an easy introduction to the masses, some of whom perceived the deeper meaning underlying the parables and became his disciples. It was not an annunciation by him of his Messiahship which brought the common people flocking to hear his sermons, but his appeal to the child-like, story-loving innocence of every man, which won him audience. He spoke of spiritual things in terms of common understanding easily comprehended by his plebeian listeners. God, he announced, is not the threatening, angry Taskmaster that the priests have described, but is rather the loving Father of all his children, the essence of all human love, kindness, mercy, and beneficence. Although to his immediate disciples he describes God as Divine Spirit, it is notable that in all his discourses to the common people God is the anthropomorphic heavenly Father. Thus every moral or spiritual truth that makes up his message is passed on to the people in the form or symbol of a natural fact. God is the heavenly Father, and all men are brothers and children of God. To be good and to do the right is to let one's candle shine before men. To practice the spiritual life is to enter in at the strait gate. False prophets and self-appointed leaders of men shall

be judged according to their fruits, for men do not gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles, and "...every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit."⁷

It is by means of this translation of spiritual concepts into natural and familiar facts that Jesus overcomes with a fair amount of success the handicap of all mystics who attempt to express the inexpressible spiritual truths gained from direct communion with God. The disadvantage of the device, of course, lies in the fact that once divine truth is arbitrarily symbolized in a natural fact, the interpretation of that symbol back into spiritual truth makes possible a wide margin of probable error, especially when that interpretation is done by men of Understanding rather than of Reason. The resulting distortion and lack of complete understanding of his doctrines by many of Jesus's own disciples and their "orthodox" congregations ever since, Emerson criticizes in "The Divinity School Address" when he says, "The idioms of his language and the figures of his rhetoric have usurped the place of his truth; and churches are not built on his principles, but on his tropes."⁸ Jesus's words,

⁷Matthew 7:17.

⁸Works, I, 129.

conceived in Reason, must be read in the light of Reason, Emerson feels, for "There is no doctrine of the Reason which will bear to be taught by the Understanding."⁹ In its original form the message of Jesus, simply stated, contained the essence of pure truth. As it was later interpreted and expanded by the addition of innumerable dogmas, it became a monstrous paradox, a patchwork creation in the image of man's own Understanding. It was the primary object of Emerson's study of the New Testament to strip away these superfluous dogmas, to get back to the earlier teachings, and with the aid of Reason to reinterpret the physical symbols used by Jesus into their original spiritual truths. This is evident from even a cursory review of his journals, but a specific instance which occurs in an entry for the year 1832 may be cited as typical:

When Jesus saith, "he that giveth one of these little ones a cup of cold water shall not lose his reward," is not the best meaning, "the love at which the giver has arrived"? "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up," "everything is transitory but what hath its life from the interior of the soul," and so on through the New Testament there is not a just or grand thought but is made more round and infinite by applying it to the soul considered as the universe, living from God within.¹⁰

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Journals, II, 508-09.

(Another element of Jesus's method, closely related to his use of physical symbols for spiritual truths, is his manner of condensing moral principles into short, succinct, down-to-earth, aphoristic phrases which would remain in the minds of his audience long after the gist of the sermon had been forgotten. So apt and so applicable to contemporary situations during the last two thousand years have his sayings proved to be that they have become a part of the folk-wisdom of all Christian countries. Such common adages as "Cast not pearls before swine," "Beware of wolves in sheep's clothing," "By their fruits ye shall know them," "A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country," and many others, have a widespread appeal as a direct result of their mixture of practical and moral truth and their apt brevity. The popularity of this device is made evident in the New Testament accounts of the vast crowds that followed Jesus to hear his story-like sermons; its effectiveness is apparent in the fact that the three major gospels disagree least in their recording of the parables and aphoristic comments of Jesus; and even theologians agree that manuscript collections of the popular "sayings of Jesus" were current long before it was felt necessary by the early Christians to transcribe and circulate the story of his life and resurrection, in anything more than epistle form.

An equally effective teaching device is his manner of relating a whole series of brief parables all illustrative of the same central idea. Like Emerson, Jesus is not content to restrict a moral truth to one physical symbol. Truth is many-sided, and his solution to the problem of describing the indescribable, again like that of Emerson, is to reveal as many sides of the truth as practicable in a series of parables, each illustrative of one aspect of divine truth. This tendency toward extended qualification, although logical and effective, often appears to be an unconscious mannerism, for it is even employed at times when spiritual truths are not in question and when a straightforward answer might be deemed more satisfactory. For example, when the disciples of John ask why it is that they and the Pharisees fast often but the disciples of Jesus not at all, they receive a reply consisting of several metaphorical symbols:

Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast. No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment; for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles, else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.¹¹

¹¹Matthew 9:15-17.

Although the meaning is clear, of course, and the method is effective, the necessity for symbolizing the answer to such a direct question is not readily apparent, and the effect on the reader is that of an overflowing of genius, of wasted power. Such criticism is trivial, however, for a recognized quality of genius may be presumed to be an indiscriminate out-pouring of its substance on all occasions.

Possibly one of the best examples of the effectiveness, completeness, and ingenuity of this particular teaching device is his extended description of the kingdom of heaven. Employing the symbols of a mustard seed, leaven, a hidden treasure, and a pearl as natural comparisons, all of which at first are seemingly insignificant but when discovered and developed are of great value, he reveals that the kingdom of heaven is in reality that spark of divinity latent within the souls of all men, which when encouraged and developed will gradually take complete possession of them, for the kingdom is within. In the very act of recognizing the potential divinity of his own soul, the individual will discover a hidden treasure, a pearl of great price.¹²

(There would seem to be no question that a close

¹²Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46.

parallel exists between the teaching methods of Jesus and Emerson, for their relationship is particularly apparent in the three-fold parallel of (1) the translation and interpretation of spiritual truths into symbolic but familiar natural facts, (2) the condensation of these moral concepts into short aphoristic sentences, and (3) the use of a series of illustrative parables or metaphorical images to present different aspects of the central idea. It seems not illogical, therefore, to assume that this emulation was intentional on Emerson's part, for many entries in the journals, written during the years when he was making an intensive study of the New Testament, unquestionably support the assumption of Emerson's direct imitation and adaptation of Jesus's method. Many passages in the early sermons, in their analysis of the method as well as the meaning of Jesus's teachings, are the result of his deliberations as recorded in the journals and are oftentimes identically phrased.) For example, to cite only one illustration, the thought and phrasing of a passage in the sermon "Religion and Society," of 1833, obviously parallel an entry in the journal for the same year.

The journal entry reads:

But will not this come to be thought the chief value of his teaching, that is, of Christianity, to wit, that it was a great stand made for man's spiritual nature against the sensualism, the forms, and the crimes of the age in which he

appeared and those that preceded it? Like every wise and efficient man, he spoke to the men of his times in all their singular peculiarities. His instruction is almost as local, as personal, as would be the teaching in one of our Sunday Schools. He speaks as he thinks, but he is thinking for them. Yet such is the extraordinary truth of his mind that his sentences have a fulness of meaning, a fitness to human nature, and an universality of application, that has commended them to the whole world.¹³

Making a few minor changes in the wording, he adapts the passage to his theme and inserts a slightly longer version into the text of his sermon.

But I ask whether it will not come to be thought the chief value of his teaching - whether it will not come to be thought the greatest value of Christianity - more than any single truth which it inculcated - the general fact that it was a brave stand made for man's spiritual nature against the sensualism, the forms, and the crimes of the age in which he appeared, and those which preceded it? The value of his particular lessons is something less to us than it was to his contemporaries, because like every wise and efficient man he spoke to his times in all their singular peculiarities. His instruction is almost as local, as personal, as would be the teaching in one of our Sunday Schools. He speaks as he thinks, but he is thinking for them. And it is the great mark of the extraordinary force of his mind that notwithstanding this occasional character his sayings have a fulness of meaning, a fitness to human nature and an universality of application which has commended them to the whole world. But in this respect their value is equal to us and to them and to all men, as a great affirmation of the beauty and excellence of moral truth, - a disclosure of that inner world of man whose existence once admitted and beheld, opens an entrance for all the

¹³Journals, III, 224.

particular doctrines of divine truth.¹⁴

Emerson's continued interest in Jesus's method and the two-fold nature of his teachings is evident throughout the early sermons, from the beginning of his ministry till his withdrawal from the church. In his attempt to reinterpret the doctrines and moral truths of Jesus's message, he often finds it necessary to remind his congregation that Jesus makes use of natural facts to symbolize eternal truths and that originally the now familiar, dignified utterances were addressed to the low and vulgar in language designed for their understanding. In the first part of his sermon "The Christian Minister," in which he outlines his plans and explains his intentions as a newly ordained minister, he announces to his congregation, in March, 1829, that he intends to fortify his own opinions by the highest authority, but that if anyone objects to a want of sanctity in his style or a want of solemnity in his illustrations:

I shall remind him, that the language and the images of Scripture which his ear requires, derive all their dignity from their association with divine truth; that they belonged once to what was low and familiar; that our Lord in his discourses condescended to explain himself by allusions to every homely fact, to the boys in the market, to the persons dropping into the custom offices; to the food on the board, to the civilities shown him by the hospitality of his entertainers; and would he not, let me ask, if he addressed himself to the men of this

¹⁴McGiffert, Young Emerson Speaks, pp. 195-96.

age and of this country, appeal with equal frequency to those arts and objects by which we are surrounded, to the printing press and the loom, to the phenomena of steam and of gas, to the magnificence of towns, to free institutions, and a petulant and vain nation?¹⁵

Thus, Emerson frankly identifies his own teaching method or preaching style with that of Jesus, and that he consistently follows this pattern is evident from a study of his sermons, lectures, and published essays. In succeeding sermons he frequently comments on the relationship of material laws to spiritual truths and defines further the manner of his own teaching. In the second part of "The Christian Minister," delivered on the following Sunday, for example, he explains to his audience: "Human nature is so much the same in all its forms that a man who draws with any accuracy his pictures of virtue and vice from such a range of acquaintance as most men possess, will continually present traits and dispositions which you recognize as familiar to your own experience."¹⁶ And in June, in a sermon entitled "Summer," he again speaks of nature as an emblem of that which is spiritual within the souls of men. Defending his own use of natural emblems and symbols in the sermons by citing the precedent of the Scriptures, he remarks:

¹⁵Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 35-36.

But there is more in nature than beauty; there is more to be seen than the outward eye perceives; there is more to be heard than the pleasant rustle of the corn. There is the language of its everlasting analogies, by which it seems to be the prophet and the monitor of the race of man. The Scripture is always appealing to the tree and the flower and the grass as the emblems of our mortal estate.... There is nothing in external nature but is an emblem, a hieroglyphic of something in us.¹⁷

The gist of Emerson's argument is that the Christian minister should not be restricted to the preaching of the dogmas of one sect, or to the repetition of conventional lessons from Scripture, but, like Jesus, his duty is to preach moral truth, and for the purpose of teaching this truth he may use whatever illustrations or sources may apply. This concept of the duties of a Christian minister does not exclude the necessity for his emphasis of and reliance on the Bible as the directly inspired word of God, but it does deny that the Bible is the only means by which the Divine Spirit makes its will known to mankind. The old Jewish prophets perceived spiritual truths underlying the natural facts of this world, and recorded them; Jesus perceived a higher law of love governing and pervading the universe, and announced the recognition and practice of this law as a new way of life in man's relationship with God,

¹⁷Ibid., p. 44.

with his fellow man, and with himself, by which the greatest possible peace and joy could be obtained. But the recording of these past perceptions did not affect their ultimate cause. The evidence of God's presence, of the Universal Law, is still visible in the material world if the individual will but look with unclouded eyes. Therefore the Christian minister should avail himself of both spiritual texts, the recorded history of past perceptions of the Divine Presence - the Bible, and the visible universe in which the presence of God may be readily seen. As Emerson states in the sermon on "Religious Liberalism and Rigidity," delivered in 1830, his "views also claim in their behalf the strong testimony of the Scriptures. But as the human mind must always be the interpreter of Scripture, they explain the Scripture in conformity with the laws of the mind; they appeal from the letter to the spirit and find one meaning in the word and the works of God."¹⁸

And earlier, in part one of "The Christian Minister," he had admitted to his congregation that his concept of the duties of a Christian teacher imposed on him the necessity of improving his mind to the highest extent possible, for "It imperiously

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 85.

demands the critical knowledge of the Christian Scriptures, which are to be considered the direct voice of the most High - the reason of God speaking to the reason of man. But does it less demand the contemplation of his benevolence and his might in his works?"¹⁹

Finally, in May, 1830, he devotes an entire sermon to the subject of "The Authority of Jesus," which consists in large part of an analysis of the teaching method of Jesus and its accompanying tone of authority which had so impressed his audiences. The germinal essence of this sermon is evident also in a passage entered in the journal for the year 1830.²⁰ Meditating on the New Testament text that Jesus "taught as one having authority," he enters in the journal his conclusion that a tone of authority cannot be imitated successfully; to be effective it must be supported by truths of authority, for no matter how foolish the multitude may be, they know whether they have been convinced or not, and they recognize essential truth as quickly as they see it.

Developing this central idea further in the sermon, he explains that Jesus neither reasons nor

¹⁹Ibid., p. 29.

²⁰Journals, II, 296.

attempts to prove logically by argument the truths of his message, but instead simply asserts these moral truths on the ground of his divine commission. Neither does he employ insinuating arts of address; he relates his perceptions of divine principles in simple, conversational discourses. Since he was neither learned, nor powerful, nor versed in the popular arts, what is the explanation of this authority with which he announced his doctrines? The only conceivable answer, says Emerson, is that the authority of Jesus ensued from the innate divine authority of the moral truth which he taught, the leading principle by which the soul during its existence must be governed. A misunderstanding of the divine authority resulting from the truth of his doctrines has led his followers to a confused separation of the man from his message and a mistaken elevation of the truth-sayer over the very truth he announces.

A great error to which we are liable on this subject, is, that we are apt to separate the truth taught by Jesus from his office, and suppose that it was his divine authority, his peculiar designation to the office of Messiah that gives authority to his words, and not his words that mark him out as the Messiah. The utterance of that truth is his office. It is his truth that made him Messiah. (And it is his goodness that revealed to him so much truth.)²¹

²¹ McGiffert, p. 96.

The main point of Emerson's argument in this sermon seems to be that essential truth is not something that can be logically disputed and conclusively proved, for it is beyond comprehension by the Understanding of man. Truth is self-evident to those who have developed their innate ability to perceive it, and it need only be offered to them in the form of a natural fact or metaphysical symbol to be immediately perceived. Those who have not yet fully developed their Reason will perceive some faint glimmers of truth, but those who have almost extinguished this faculty as a result of an inordinate preoccupation with Understanding and a short-sighted concentration on material values will see it not at all. Jesus and Paul both designate such persons metaphorically as "blind" or "dead," and it is with this meaning that Jesus speaks to his disciples of those who "seeing, see not; and hearing, hear not, neither do they understand."

But blessed are your eyes, for they see:
and your ears, for they hear. For verily
I say unto you, That many prophets and
righteous men have desired to see those
things which ye see, and have not seen
them; and to hear those things which ye
hear, and have not heard them.²²

It would seem that at the same time Emerson was

²²Matthew 13:16-17.

engaged in his intensive study of the New Testament in an attempt to extract from it the original message of Jesus, free from the interpolations, misinterpretations, and attached dogmas which had become so vital to orthodoxy, he became increasingly interested in the method chosen by Jesus for the annunciation of his truth and the instruction of the multitude. Possibly this interest was the direct result of Emerson's growing awareness that the old, conventional, logically organized sort of sermon employed by his own ancestors and by many of his contemporaries would not convey to an orthodox audience the original spiritual truths expressed by Jesus, which he wished to re-announce. He must have realized that even though truth may be self-evident to the fully developed Reason, it cannot be logically "proved" by any recognized form of theological argument; therefore, the most effective means for translating to the many the divine perceptions of the few must be those employed by Jesus himself, for any teacher who hopes to announce such truths to the multitude must interpret spiritual concepts into symbolic but familiar natural facts for their better understanding by common men; furthermore, he must attempt to condense these moral concepts into brief aphoristic sentences to aid men in retaining these truths; and, finally, he must employ a series of

aphoristic parables, each containing a slightly different aspect of the central thought of the lesson, so that his audience may arrive at a comprehension of the spiritual truth through a series of easy stages. Whatever may have been the actual thoughts of Emerson, his perceptive analyses in the journals of the various devices used by Jesus in his teaching, his use and justification of this method in his sermons by citing the Scriptures as precedent, and his extended comments on and continued use of the method in sermon, lecture, and essay, would indicate that he consciously imitated and adapted the teaching method of Jesus as the most effective yet devised for the propagation of transcendental doctrines.

VIII

EPILOGUE

It may be argued that ferreting out the origins of Emerson's ideas is pedantic, that the important thing is his thought and his expression of it. But the quotations and references in his published works suggest antecedents, and writers on Emerson have freely discussed the origins of his thought and its relationship to the Platonic, Neoplatonic, and Oriental philosophies. The more cautious of these scholars, notably Carpenter, have observed that, important as these influences were, they helped direct rather than initiate and inspire the development of Emerson's philosophy. Hence identifying a major or the major source and influence tends to straighten the record and to establish more clearly the actual role of the other philosophical schools. Furthermore, understanding the relation of Emerson's thought to that of the New Testament is important to a full realization of the man and his work, for it shows that he began with and stayed within the philosophy central to Western life and thought and that he wanted to redeem the church and its ministry by returning to a purer form of Christianity, the actual

teachings of Jesus, not by importing a remote philosophy. It shows how systematically his mind worked to achieve his purpose by availing himself of the fresh phraseology of other philosophies and religions to present in a new light the old moral truths which Jesus had originally taught, free of the encrustations of Christian dogma and tradition.

Maintaining as its objective the identification of the major source of and earliest influence on Emerson's thought, the present study has pointed out that before he could have been significantly affected by these philosophies, the influence of which became most evident in the 1840's, he had left the pulpit, had published Nature, and had drifted far from orthodoxy. These facts suggested the investigation here of the Bible as the earliest source of his basic philosophical concepts. The findings of this investigation have been conclusive, for not only have the major elements of Emerson's thought been shown to be entirely consistent with the fundamental principles of Jesus, but, further, the study has shown, through the evidence of the journals, letters, and early sermons, that each of his basic beliefs was directly inspired by the moral lessons of Jesus in the New Testament.

The first and most important of these basic beliefs,

one central to his entire philosophy, the concept of the Over-Soul, is shown in the journals and sermons to have been drawn in its embryonic state directly from Jesus's teachings concerning God the Spirit and heavenly Father and supported by the recorded words of both Jesus and Paul. The growth and development of this idea through the journal entries, sermons, lectures, and published essays was but the logical extension of the primary principle expounded by Jesus, and, in spite of the great amount of quotation and paraphrase from other sources, the idea even in its final stage is wholly consistent with Jesus's conception of God as the eternal, omnipresent, and omnipotent Spirit. In a like manner the familiar Emersonian doctrine of Self-Reliance originated in the Christian idea of God-reliance, a reliance on the "higher self," or what Paul calls the "inner man." Along with the doctrine of Self-Reliance, another early concept, Compensation, derived immediately from New Testament sources. It receives the earliest well-considered treatment in the journals and is the idea perhaps most often referred to under various guises in the sermons.

The study further revealed that although the law of Compensation is implied in the teachings of Jesus, as the journals and sermons note, Emerson

drew mainly upon Paul's epistles for textual support of the idea. Emerson's belief in the importance of the individual was recognized, of course, as an inherent and basic tenet of the Christian tradition, but it was also a natural corollary of his fundamental concepts of the Over-Soul and Self-Reliance. Likewise his earliest conception of good and evil was a logical extension of the law of Compensation, closely associated with his distinction between Reason and Understanding, and, like them, drawn directly from Paul's epistolary interpretations of the Christian message. Although good and evil and compensation or retribution are apparent to the Understanding in the physical world, Reason perceives that there is neither good, evil, nor compensation in the spiritual world but only fact, God's will, and true good.

Thus the conclusion from this study is that all the major elements of Emerson's thought were derived ultimately from the New Testament and were fixed in his mind and advanced in his early sermons prior to the publication of Nature in 1836 and well before other sources had made their influence felt in the development and expression of his philosophy.

Although Emerson first made the acquaintance in 1830 of De Gérando's Histoire Comparée des Systèmes de Philosophie, a book which inspired in him a life-

long interest in Greek and Oriental philosophy, it is clear that the Neoplatonists did not exert any considerable influence on him until 1842-1843, when he first met with Thomas Taylor's translations of Plato and the Neoplatonists, and that there is little evidence of any discernible influence of the Oriental scriptures on his works till after 1845. Hence the present study has begun with the assumption that any influence exerted on Emerson by these philosophies in the 1840's came at too late a date to affect significantly the formation of the chief elements of his thought, and has concluded that a major or the major source and influence must have been the New Testament, for the sermons written before 1830 have shown that his philosophical bent was already fixed, and in 1832 he had already determined to act upon his decision to leave the church in order to have more freedom of speech and action than he had in the pulpit. By 1836 he had formulated his conclusions so completely that he was ready to present them to a wider audience in his first major publication.

The real reason for Emerson's breaking away from the church and the subsequent publication of his transcendental philosophy in Nature has never been explained to entire satisfaction, for no one accepts his sudden excuse of a dislike for archaic forms of

ceremony, such as that of the Lord's Supper, as the real cause of his resignation, when the journals give ample testimony that he had long felt that such rituals were merely the superstitious additions of the early Christian Church in its struggle to achieve contemporary respectability. Generally, Emerson's action is viewed as the result of a desire for independence from an unpleasant round of ministerial duties, as the first practical effect of his own philosophical conviction of the necessity for self-reliance, or, at worst, as an amusing aspect of that Nemesis of all Yankees, the New England conscience. The first view is undoubtedly at least partially correct, but it must be remembered that Emerson never really ceased in effect to be a minister preaching what he himself chose to call a Natural Religion. Therefore, it would seem that Emerson's real reason for breaking his ties with the church was to disentangle himself from the restrictions of Unitarian orthodoxy in order to preach a more natural religion and a more liberal philosophy than would be possible within these bounds.

In Emerson's journals and sermons written during the period of his active ministry, there seems to be a continuous and a growing awareness of the difficulty his congregation has in perceiving any deeper meaning in his sermons than the orthodox connotations which

his enforced conventional terms convey. In each succeeding sermon he substitutes more and more abstract terms for such conventional language in an effort to translate the materialistic and earthly symbols employed by the Jews and early Greeks back into spiritual and transcendental terms. God is no longer the anthropomorphic King of heaven, nor the genial and patriarchal Father, who utters arbitrary though benevolent decrees for the guidance of his earthly children. He is rather the Divine Spirit, which animates the universe, and whose laws are just and consistent, the visible effects of its presence, and the attributes of the Divine Spirit itself. Such efforts were evidently not enough, and Emerson must have soon realized that in order to announce the truth as he perceived it he must be free to employ language which would arouse no preconceived ideas in the minds of a generally orthodox audience. Naturally, other reasons must have entered into his decision, and it is probable that the untimely death of Ellen Tucker Emerson was the incident which determined him to make the break which he had long felt to be necessary.

Emerson's decision to separate from the church and to preach his views to a worldwide audience was therefore not sudden, unpremeditated, or fortuitous but was the natural and inevitable result of the growth

of his mind and outlook. Educated in the Unitarian tradition of the necessity for the individual's personal interpretation of the Scriptures for his own guidance, Emerson soon came to have doubts concerning certain conventional beliefs and interpretations still retained by Unitarian orthodoxy. This period of growth is clearly evident in the journals and sermons and reaches its climax in his famous farewell sermon in 1832 on "The Lord's Supper." It is apparent that by this date Emerson had largely outgrown the restrictions of Unitarianism and was convinced that in order to teach spiritual truth as he perceived it he must seek a larger, more liberal-minded audience who would be accessible seven days a week rather than a mere habitually stolid two hours every Sunday.

A period of six years intervened, during which he remarried, published Nature, and fathered a son, before there is evidence of a further growth and overleaping of conventional bounds. To a Harvard graduating class in 1838 he delivered the famous "Divinity School Address," which aroused, as he remarked to Carlyle, a tempest in the Boston teacup. Six years earlier he had signaled his freedom from the restraints of Unitarianism with a detailed criticism of such a typical though relatively minor institution as the Lord's Supper; in 1838 he proclaimed his

further deliverance from the whole structure of formalized Christianity. From this date he was a minister of neither Unitarianism nor Christianity but an acknowledged minister of the World Church of the Divine Spirit. The Christian Bible is indeed the divinely inspired word of God as recorded by men, but it is not the only Bible; Jesus is certainly the perfect and divinely inspired Son of Man, but he is not alone; and the basic Christian moral principles are true, but they are not the whole truth. Many are the witnesses to divine truth in this world, and it is Emerson's avowed purpose to test, to correlate, and to announce them. All the Essays published in the years that followed may be considered Emerson's annunciation of the individual truths which he had ascertained.

As just remarked, however, one of Emerson's purposes was not only to test and to announce these truths but also to correlate. It is with this essential unity of his whole philosophy in mind that one must approach his works. In the course of this study the cyclical nature of his philosophy, as presented in the essays, has often been noted. The mutual interdependency of all the major elements of his thought and their direct descent from and immediate relation to the all-inclusive concept of the Over-Soul have also been remarked. Although Emerson treats his beliefs

under separate headings - Self-Reliance, Compensation, the Importance of the Individual, the distinction between Good and Evil, and others - he interprets and explains them all as the attributes of the omnipresent Over-Soul. This unity or one-ness of Emerson's philosophical system, in reply to those critics who claim the absence of all system, may perhaps be best symbolized in his own image of truth as the perfect sphere, composed of innumerable interdependent concentric circles, each of which is subordinate but also necessary to the unity of the whole. It is his belief that all truths or "laws," whether of the Understanding or of the Reason, will fit into this pattern, for a truth of the Understanding in the physical world is but an arc of a perfect circle which is exactly equal to a corresponding arc, a truth of the Reason, in the spiritual world.

It is in this sense that he refers to natural facts as mirroring moral truths and to the physical world as being the visible image of the spiritual. The perception, comprehension, and classification of all truth, however, is a task beyond the capabilities of any one man, and Emerson makes no claim to having formulated a complete philosophical system. He is content, he often remarks, to present the partial truths and glimpses of truth vouchsafed to him, by

Reason and intuition, to serve as hints of the vastness of the system comprehended in the union of All in the Over-Soul. As he explains in the essay on "Compensation," "I shall attempt...to record some facts that indicate the path of the law of Compensation; happy beyond my expectation if I shall truly draw the smallest arc of this circle."¹ Thus, although Emerson makes no pedantic attempt to comprehend all truth in his philosophy or to construct for the benefit of his critics a complete and "logical" philosophical system to be pontifically announced in a series of essays, it nevertheless cannot be doubted that the ideal and the vision of the perfect system are present in his thought and writing, for the smallest arc still implies the existence of a complete circle, and interdependent, interlocking circles imply the presence of a unified, all-embracing sphere.

The plan of this study has required a fairly complete statement of the main elements in Emerson's thought as it stands in his published works. This statement, restricted to his most important beliefs and to his major pronouncements on them, shows an internal logic and consistency of his philosophy which I believe most readers of Emerson have not recognized.

¹Works, 11, 96.

This investigation reveals, furthermore, a thorough-going logic in the development of his philosophy from the earliest records of his thinking in the journals, through the sermons he delivered in the pulpit, to the essays of his mature years. This study has made it clear also that Emerson's chief ideas are not simply reconcilable with the teachings of the New Testament, but are in fact an elaboration and further development of those ideas under the forces exerted by his own idealistic temperament and outlook, the general optimistic atmosphere of his times, and the specific men and books he encountered. Thus it is evident - and very significant to a full understanding of Emerson and his writings - that his thought was based on the religious philosophy of the Christian world and was colored by such remote philosophies as the Oriental and Neoplatonic only as they confirmed and were adaptable to the central concepts which remained essentially unchanged in Emerson's thought.

As a result of his deliberate attempt to control his mystical tendencies and to interpret his perceptions of essential truth in terms of common understanding and in the guise of folk-wisdom, Emerson has gained the disfavor, often bordering on contempt, of those who have seen only the simplicity of his language and design without perceiving the depth of his thought.

I believe, however, that the recent increase in the number of studies of Emerson and his philosophy indicates a renewed and a more sympathetic interest in the meaning and complexities of his thought. Such an examination will inevitably result in a more favorable re-estimation of his stature as one of our native American philosophers. Certainly his contribution to man's comprehension of himself and his universe deserves far greater recognition than it has hitherto been accorded.

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Lee Wells Miller was born on November 29, 1921, in Waterbury, Vermont, where he received his public school education. In 1939 he entered Cedarville College, from which he was graduated in 1942 with the B. A. degree. He was inducted into the Army of the United States soon after graduation, and in 1943 he was married to Miss Lillian Gilliam, a college classmate. After being honorably discharged on February 5, 1946, in the fall of that year he entered The Rice Institute, where he was granted a fellowship in English, and received his M. A. degree in the spring of 1948. The following year he spent as an instructor in English at North Texas State College before entering Louisiana State University, where as a Graduate Assistant he continued his work toward the doctorate until the fall of 1951. From that time he has been an assistant professor of English at North Texas State College.

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Title of Thesis: Emerson and the New Testament

Approved:

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Date of Examination:

April 7, 1953